

Few COVID Cases, One Death Reported in MMDHD



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By Emma Selmon
Herald Staff Writer

Four new COVID-19 cases and one COVID-related death were identified in the entirety of the Mid-Michigan District [Health](#) Department (MMDHD) jurisdiction as of Tuesday.

A Masonic Pathways resident in his 90s passed away from COVID-19 this week, bringing Gratiot County's death toll up to 12. Ten of those deaths are related to nursing home outbreaks.

Gratiot County gained two new positive cases as well, and is now reporting 81 cases. Montcalm and Clinton each gained a single case this week and are reporting no new deaths. Montcalm is now reporting a cumulative total of 74 cases and one death, and Clinton is reporting 146 cases and 11 deaths.

Elsewhere in mid-Michigan, Isabella County gained five new cases and one death, and is now reporting 83 cases and eight deaths. Midland County saw cases spike this week, gaining 21 new cases but no new deaths. Midland is now reporting a total of 111 cases and nine deaths.

In Saginaw County, 28 new cases were identified and five new deaths were reported, bringing the cumulative total up to 1,136 positive cases and 117 deaths.

As of Tuesday, the state of Michigan is reporting a total of 60,189 cumulative positive cases and 5,790 COVID-related deaths.

MMDHD, National Guard Hold Free COVID-19 Testing Event in Alma



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Members of the Michigan National Guard explain the procedure for a COVID-19 test. One of the guardsmen described the sensation of the COVID-19 nasal swab as “tickling your brain.” (Herald photo – Selmon)

By Emma Selmon
Herald Staff Writer

Over 200 people took advantage of Gratiot’s first large-scale COVID-19 testing event on Saturday. Held from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Alma Middle School parking lot and hosted by the Mid-Michigan District [Health](#) Department (MMDHD), 216 individuals came to the drive-up clinic. Members of the National Guard administered the tests.

The pop-up clinic was one of eight similar events the National Guard assisted with throughout the state this weekend.

Marcus Cheatham, MMDHD health officer, said that the participation was lower than they were hoping for. The MMDHD would have liked to have had around 400 participants, and the National Guard prepared for many more than that: they came equipped with a whopping 15,000 test kits that day.

This event was the first opportunity for many people to receive a test in Gratiot County. While the hospital and some area healthcare providers have had testing available for some time, “there have been bottlenecks” as the number of people seeking a COVID test exceeded the capacity at those places.

Testing at Saturday’s event was available to everyone 18 years and older at no cost, with no referral needed.

People without symptoms — and people without a healthcare provider — could get tested as well.

Saturday’s clinic took place partly at the request of Gratiot County Commissioner George Bailey, who was concerned about the testing gap in Gratiot. Cheatham said it “took a while” to put the event together, with “a lot of folks” working together to make it happen.

In addition to MMDHD personnel and the National Guardsmen, the State Police and the Gratiot County Emergency Operations Center were involved in the event. Local fire departments lent equipment as well.

While the MMDHD was hoping for more participation, they weren’t entirely surprised at the light turnout. They had heard that these pop-up COVID testing clinics saw fewer attendees in rural areas that currently have low levels of the virus, because most people are “pretty sure they’re not sick,” Cheatham said. But even negative test results are helpful to the organizations that study how COVID-19 is moving throughout the area.

Cheatham said that it’s “disappointing” that more people in rural areas aren’t taking advantage of these opportunities.

“We’d really like to get some epidemiological insight into how prevalent [COVID-19] is, and if people aren’t getting tested, we still won’t really know,” he said.

The 216 individuals who were tested were not all Gratiot County residents, either. Cheatham said that people came from “all over” to get tested, traveling in from places like Saginaw, Lansing and Mt. Pleasant for the event. Others who weren’t aware the clinic was available stopped by to get tested when they saw the sign by the road. When asked if the MMDHD expected to see a rise in positive cases following this event, Cheatham said that that “partly depends” on who came in to get tested.

“A problem with the pop-up testing is you get people who have the time and the means to be tested, and they’re probably people who are sheltering at home safely,” he said. “And so more vulnerable groups — people who are having to work in high-risk areas, essential workers — aren’t necessarily being tested, and they’re more the ones who we’d like to test.”

The MMDHD will be working with the state to try to secure “targeted testing” for those vulnerable groups. Cheatham said that in order to make that a reality, they would potentially partner with employers to test local workers.

Prior to Saturday’s event, Greater Gratiot Development alerted area businesses about the clinic so they could encourage their employees to get tested, but Cheatham said it’s hard to know how many local workers actually came.

The testing available on Saturday was PCR testing, which can detect whether someone is currently carrying the virus. The serological testing, or antibody testing, that determines whether a person had COVID-19 in the past and has recovered, was not available at Saturday’s event.

Participants were told to expect their results within six to eight days. For those who tested positive, they will be instructed to self-isolate and the MMDHD will trace and test the people they’ve been in close contact with.

And for those who tested negative, they still need to take precautions to protect themselves from catching the virus. Workplaces need to be “really scrupulous” about practicing social distancing, wearing masks to protect others, and screening for symptoms to avoid a resurgence of cases in the area, Cheatham said.

But still, the single best thing people can do to protect themselves is to continue to stay at home.

“We know that there’s a sort of COVID weariness that’s setting in,” Cheatham said. “People are struggling with how to keep staying home when they really want to go out, but that’s still the best thing to do.”

Community Garden Planted at Former Alma Middle School Site



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Linda Bader, manager of the St. Louis Farmers Market, waters newly-planted flowers at the community garden planting session on Saturday. The market is a member of the Live Well Gratiot group that established the garden. (Herald photo – Selmon)



Alma College seniors Mackenzie Hemmer and Shane Henry, both healthcare administration majors and interns with the Mid-Michigan District [Health](#) Department, spearheaded the community garden. Hemmer said the pair were glad to help “bring the community together” for the project. (Herald photo – Selmon)

By Emma Selmon
Herald Staff Writer

Thanks to the efforts of several community organizations, a long-vacant lot in Alma is seeing new life this summer.

The Live Well Gratiot group, a subset of the Gratiot County Collaborative Council, has established a community garden at the corner of Pine Avenue and East Downie Street in Alma. The land, which is the former

site of the Alma Middle School, is used with permission of Gemini Capital Management, LLC, who is on track to begin construction of a residential development on the site next year.

Community volunteers joined members of the various organizations for the first planting on Saturday morning. With the Farmers Market in full swing across the street, the volunteers worked from 7 to 11 a.m. to plant a variety of foods.

The garden is currently home to several tomato plants as well as carrots, zucchini, cucumber, peppers, watermelon and musk melon. Rows of flowers line the edges of the plots.

All of the plants were donated, with some coming from Bonnie Plants, the Greater Lansing Food Bank Garden Project, and Alma True Value Hardware.

The community garden is a project that Live Well Gratiot has been discussing for some time, but this is the first year that it's come to fruition. Emily Rayburn, a representative for Child Advocacy on the Collaborative Council and a member of the Live Well Gratiot team, said that the project was largely made possible due to Ryan Smith of Gemini Capital Management, who graciously allowed the group to use the land.

Rayburn said that Live Well Gratiot is "so excited" for the opportunity.

"The overall goal of this project is to provide a place for community members to come together and to also provide fresh produce for free to our community members," Rayburn said.

"We are encouraging our fellow community members to really embrace this project so that it can be another positive addition to Gratiot County and our residents," she continued.

While this effort was a collaboration between a number of local businesses and organizations, leading the charge were two Alma College students, Shane Henry and Mackenzie Hemmer. The rising seniors, who are both majoring in healthcare administration, are both serving as interns with the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) this summer.

Henry said that after a few very busy and "hardworking" weeks of preparation, Saturday ended up being a "great day." He and Hemmer were pleased to see a good volunteer turnout and a successful planting session, and Hemmer said it was "relieving" to finally see it all come together.

And the volunteers who came out to work seemed to enjoy the experience as well. Linda Bader, who represents the St. Louis Farmers Market on the Collaborative Council and is also a member of Live Well Gratiot, said she and the rest of the group were "really pleased" to be able to help get plants in the ground on Saturday.

"I think when a bunch of people get together and everybody works together, great things like this can happen," she said.

At the end of the summer, Henry said the produce will be donated to local food banks and farmers markets. But in the meantime, people will be needed to keep the garden going, watering, weeding and tending to the plants, Hemmer said.

The pair plans to host more community work days at the garden in the future, and work will need to be done aside from those dates as well. Interested volunteers can reach out to Henry or Hemmer through the Gratiot County Community Garden Facebook page.

Daily News

Friday, June 26, 2020

Health officer: ‘Places are resisting’ coronavirus testing

Free coronavirus testing is available, but many aren’t interested

By [Elisabeth Waldon](#) | on June 26, 2020

ITHACA — The Mid-Michigan District Health Department is continuing to push for more coronavirus testing, but much of the public isn’t interested.



Michigan National Guard Spc. Chase Maxson, assigned to 1436th Engineer Co. from Montague, administers coronavirus tests as part of free testing offered by the Michigan National Guard and the Mid-Michigan District Health Department in Alma on June 13. The health department had 1,500 test kits available, but only 216 people came to be tested. — U.S. Air National Guard Photo | Staff Sgt. Jacob Cessna

One example: a free testing event offered on June 13 at Alma Middle School in Gratiot County. The event was a joint effort between the health department, which serves Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm counties, and the Michigan National Guard.

The event began with four lanes set up for drive-thru testing, but by early afternoon, attendance was so low, the 27 National Guard troops told health department officials they could leave.

“It quickly became evident that we were not going to be that busy,” Health Officer Marcus Cheatham summarized during Wednesday morning’s Board of Health meeting. “We had 1,500 test kits, our goal was to do 500 tests and we did 216 tests.”

According to the health department’s Emergency Preparedness Coordinator Hailey Brewer, 95% to 98% of those who attended the event were from Gratiot County, while the rest came from neighboring counties.

“The public seems to be lost,” Clinton County Commissioner Dwight Washington said. “I don’t see them wearing masks. I don’t see them staying six feet apart.”

Cheatham said he’s been a bit surprised at the number of law enforcement officials and emergency responders who don’t want to be tested.



Members of the Michigan National Guard administer coronavirus tests as part of free testing offered by the Michigan National Guard and the Mid-Michigan District Health Department in Alma on June 13. The health department had 1,500 test kits available, but only 216 people came to be tested. — U.S. Air National Guard Photo | Staff Sgt. Jacob Cessna

“There are some in all three counties (Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm) who don’t want to get tested or have testing in some of the jails,” he said. “After considering their options, they decided not to do it. It may seem intrusive and complicated to them, and since they don’t have COVID-19 cases right now, that they’ve just decided to wait. You would think our first responders would be on board, but very often they don’t want to be tested. It’s hit or miss with testing law enforcement. In Clinton County it’s an absolute no, they’re just not doing it.”

Cheatham said the health department plans to encourage continued testing but continues to expect some pushback.

“If I go to a big box store and say, ‘I’d like to test all your employees’ — and we’re going to try this — but how likely are they to say ‘oh yes, we’re going to let you test our employees so if they show symptoms we have to send them

home from work,” he said. “It’s becoming very difficult. Places are resisting. It’s very tough. Our struggle is thinking about this issue and how to handle it. We feel like we really need to be testing these other populations.”

Also noted during Wednesday’s meeting was a “bad experience” regarding a testing process.

Cheatham told the Daily News this involved BioReference, a lab in New Jersey, which the state of Michigan contracts with to process tests done by the National Guard.

“In the past, the lab was unable to complete the tests and get the results back to the ordering physician,” Cheatham told the Daily News. “The National Guard says that problem is fixed now, and we’ll see.”

Also during Wednesday’s meeting, Dr. Jennifer Morse, the medical director for the health department, reported that as of April 21, just 1.2% of Michigan residents had been tested since the start of the pandemic, but from May 15 to June 15, a total of 460,705 polymerase chain reaction tests were done, accounting for 4.6% of Michigan’s population.

Morse said antibody tests, also known as serology tests, are not helpful in controlling the spread of the coronavirus because antibodies against the virus don’t form until after a person is no longer contagious. It is not yet known whether having antibodies means a person is immune to the virus or, if so, how long that immunity might last.

ST. LOUIS

TOXIC RETURNS



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JANE KEON

An Environmental Protection Agency project manager had initially estimated a recovery of about four tanker loads of highly toxic DNAPL substance from the former Velsicol Chemical site as the Pine River Superfund Citizen's Task Force continue cleanup efforts. One particular one-and-a-half acre site (Area 2) has yielded double that amount, demonstrating just how contaminated the site actually is.

Velsicol Chemical Superfund cleanup yielding much more waste than estimated

By Linda Gittleman
For the Morning Sun

No one on the Pine River Superfund Citizen's Task Force was shocked at the huge amount of highly toxic waste being pulled from the ground as the cleanup in St. Louis is underway.

Members have learned that when it comes to the Velsicol Chemical Superfund cleanup, everything is always much worse than expected.

Environmental Protection Agency Project Manager Tom Alcamo had estimated that they would recover about four tanker truck loads of liquid DNAPL, said Jane Keon chair of the group.

So far they've had eight tanker loads on just the one-and-a-half-acre site (Area 2) and there's no let-up yet.

That's more than 50 tons of waste that's been removed.

DNAPL stands for dense, non-aqueous phase liquid that does not dissolve in water. It's made up of a combination of chemicals that are highly toxic.

"The waste is trucked to an EPA-licensed commercial facility in Arkansas where it is incinerated," she said.

Keon pointed out that the

EPA's clean up of the 52-acre plant site is beginning with the "hot spots," or the most dangerous areas.

"Those are the sources of the continuing pollution of the river and the groundwater," Keon said.

Area 2, located in the northeast corner of the plant site, is where the insecticide DDT was made and it's near where the fire retardant PBB was made, she said.

In order to pull the contamination from the site, the ground is heated to 110 degrees Celsius. The heating makes the DNAPL more liquified, she said.

And it's an expensive proposition.

Alcamo told members that the electricity required costs about \$1 million a month, Keon said.

"The EPA's contract with the thermal destruction company, Cascade, called for the underground heating to cease on July 7. Alcamo said there has been no reduction in the amount of waste coming up, so heating will continue until they see "diminishing returns," she said.

They have also discovered something a bit different in

CLEANUP » PAGE 3



DNAPL is shorthand for "dense, non-aqueous phase liquid," generally a combination of highly toxic chemicals that do not dissolve in water. The ground must be heated to 110 degrees Celsius, or about 230 degrees Fahrenheit, in order to liquefy the DNAPL for easier recovery. That process alone utilizes amounts of electricity costing an estimated \$1 million a month, according to an EPA project official.

Cleanup

FROM PAGE 1

this hot spot.

Alcamo told Keon that this DNAPL is different in appearance and consistency than the DNAPL drawn up from the one acre Area 1 cleanup.

The DNAPL from Area 1 was black and that is because fuel might have been dumped there, Keon said.

Area 2's contamination is clear and it smells different.

Samples have been sent to labs to determine the constituents, she said.

"The workers at the site, and the local residents, are protected from harm by several air monitoring systems. The thermal treatment process treats both liquid and vapor toxins," she said.

Workers at the site also wear the latest in high-tech hazmat gear.

Coronavirus outbreaks tied to migrant farm workers in Michigan

ROBIN ERB AND JONATHAN OOSTING
Bridge Magazine

Coronavirus outbreaks among migrant workers are contributing to an uptick in cases in Michigan, which experts blame on short growing seasons, crowded housing, tenuous income and mistrust of government.

In the past few weeks, health officials have identified outbreaks in Lapeer, Oceana and Branch counties among workers tending to farms. The outbreaks come as Michigan's caseload is tracking upward, with more than 300 new cases in each of the past two days this week.

In Oceana County, along Michigan's west coast, more than 183 cases since May 1 have been traced to two agriculture outbreaks, with 102 of those cases in two farms alone, said Lynn Sutfin, a Michigan health spokesperson.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has attempted to address the problem with an executive order requiring migrant housing operators to separate worker beds by at least six feet when possible and encourage them to sleep head-to-toe. The order, which is set to expire next week, also requires isolation units for sick workers and other safeguards.

But the rules haven't always been followed, and health officials have found that keeping sick workers off the job is far from easy, said Dr. Jennifer Morse, medical director for three health districts covering 19 counties in north and central Michigan.

"We've had to resign ourselves to bending the rules a bit ... No matter what we say, they're going to find work," she said.

Migrant workers sometimes hide symptoms from employers — worried that they will lose the pay on which they and their families rely. Some may worry about deportation, Morse said.

They also live and socialize in tight quarters in Michigan's largely rural stretches, she said.

Meanwhile, farm owners and employees are reluctant to force sick workers from their shifts or try to quarantine them in separate housing. They worry they'll lose workers to competitor farms while their own produce in the fields and greenhouses goes to waste.

And if that happens, sick workers continue the outbreak at the other farms, Morse said.

While workers continue to report to the job, contamination in the food supply is "highly unlikely," Morse, the medical director, said.

She cited the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which reports "no evidence that food is associated with spreading the virus that causes COVID-19."

And to be sure, migrant workers are believed to be a tiny fraction of Michigan's 62,000 cases. In all, nearly 6,000 Michigan residents have died of the virus.

MIGRANT WORKERS COMMON

Using migrant labor is "a very common practice in Michigan, particularly for vegetable and fruit farms," said Florencia Colella, a farm business management educator with Michigan State University Extension.

Those workers are typically grouped together in housing units without individual bedrooms, which makes them "more susceptible" to contracting germs or a virus, Colella said.

Recent COVID-19 farm outbreaks are "terrible" but predictable because housing, health care and language barriers make migrant workers "vulnerable" to the virus, said Diana Marin, a supervising attorney for the Michigan Immigrant Rights Center.

She said outbreaks among migrant work-



Michigan public health experts are trying to contain outbreaks among migrant workers that are crucial to Michigan's agriculture. — Bridge Magazine file photo

ers began in April.

In recent weeks, at least 19 migrant employees of a construction company tested positive for COVID-19 after staying in a Bay County hotel. They came to Michigan to work on the recovery effort following Midland floods in mid-May and left the state despite health officials' urgings they quarantine.

In Lapeer County, eight cases of COVID-19 were connected to the county's migrant population, prompting additional testing last week. That detected another 24 cases, most of whom are connected to three migrant workers camps, a couple of county residents, and the original reported cluster, according to the Lapeer County Health Department.

Marin said Whitmer's executive order is "one of the best things we've seen" but it could have been issued earlier and needs to be extended and uniformly enforced.

Marin said she's concerned about temporary agricultural workers on H2-A visas. They are often given "very little information about what to expect" as they travel to Michigan, usually by bus from Mexico, she said.

When they arrive, they are "completely dependent on their employer" for transportation to places like the grocery store and typically stay in "barrack-style housing," she said.

Social distancing in those units is "impossible," Marin said. "Even with the governor's order, it says that if there are bunk beds you 'do your best. You tell people to sleep head to toe.' So it's definitely an issue for workers."

Most migrant farm workers come to Michigan from Mexico but the global pandemic has "changed the landscape a little bit," said Colella of MSU Extension.

Nationally, more workers this summer have been coming from less common countries like South Africa and Guatemala.

Aside from temporary foreign workers, some Michigan farmers utilize domestic workers who typically migrate north from Florida and Texas, two states that are now seeing spikes in coronavirus cases. And in the upcoming blueberry season, workers often travel here after working in earlier harvest states like Georgia and New Jersey, according to Marin.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends anyone coming into the United States from a foreign country quarantine for 14 days to ensure they are not spreading COVID. But if workers are not paid during that period, they could be less likely to report future symptoms for fear of losing income, she said.

There's a "misconception" that H2-A workers are just single men coming to the United States for a paycheck, "when in fact, they have families of their own back home," Marin said.

"They are here because these are the best

paying jobs they can find, and they're doing things that we all benefit from, like cultivating our fruits and vegetables."

'RAFT OF INFORMATION'

Maroia Farms in Branch County, which includes a 2.2 million-square foot greenhouse, was the site of another outbreak, according to the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency.

The farm had taken a "proactive approach," working closely with the tri-county health department during the pandemic.

Maroia had conducted daily screenings and temperature checks on each shift. It had conducted mass testing, emphasized proper hand washing among workers, and installed hand sanitizing stations throughout the farm, according to a prepared statement from the health agency.

Additionally, it staggered shifts and break times, mandated face coverings, created housing isolation areas for workers with COVID-19 symptoms, divided some of their living quarters and installed plexiglass separators in some areas, the health agency said.

Those safety measures were implemented before the outbreak, said Maroia Farms spokesperson Julia Shreve.

As of Thursday, all but two of the infected workers had completed their quarantine and returned to work, Shreve said. Those last two workers are set to complete their quarantine Friday.

The Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is "working feverishly" to visit migrant labor housing facilities licensed by the state and ensure compliance with Whitmer's order, said spokesperson Jessy Sielski.

The department, which employs seven migrant housing inspectors, has already visited Maroia Farms and found it had "a comprehensive and extensive plan" for worker safety that had been implemented, including testing and isolation protocols, Sielski said.

Inspectors have not yet visited two Oceana County farms with recent outbreaks but plan to soon, Sielski told Bridge, adding the department confirmed both farms have created COVID-19 preparedness plans required by the governor's order.

Many farmers had already adopted the kind of policies Whitmer required June 1 and were relatively well prepared to handle the pandemic because of a long-standing emphasis on sanitation, said Craig Anderson, manager of the agriculture labor and safety services program for the Michigan Farm Bureau.

But the industry is looking for clearer guidance, he told Bridge.

"There is just a raft of information out there, and it's very difficult to sort through what it is we should be doing," Anderson said.

Riverdale Septic Talks To Resume Following COVID-19 Delay



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By Emma Selmon
Herald Staff Writer

After a months-long hiatus, plans are once again in the works for a meeting to discuss a long-term solution for the inadequate septic systems in Riverdale.

Though a date has yet to be determined, representatives from the Water Resources Department (WRD) of Michigan's Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE) and the Mid-Michigan District [Health](#) Department (MMDHD) are planning to sit down in the coming weeks with members of the Seville Township board and Riverdale Citizens Sewer Committee. Plans for this meeting began in early March, but were put on hold when COVID-19 related shutdowns were rolled out throughout the state just two weeks later.

With current COVID-19 restrictions, only 10 people would be allowed to be physically present in the meeting room, but Cheri Meyer of the WRD said that both her department and the MMDHD would be able to meet virtually.

To be discussed at the meeting is what "long-term solution" is best for Riverdale and Seville Township in regards to the problem of inadequate septic systems. As the heart of the issue are 12 properties whose septic systems were discovered to be directly connected into the county storm drain and were discharging raw septage into the Pine River.

After Riverdale citizens were informed of the pollution, they led an effective grassroots campaign to disconnect those 12 properties and stop the pollution. According to Bob Lombard, chairman of the Riverdale Citizens Sewer Committee, 11 of those properties currently either have a permit on file for new septic systems, or have already installed new septic systems. Properties who have yet to install a system are currently on "pump-and-haul."

While the WRD and the MMDHD acknowledge the efforts of the township to disconnect the properties, they continue to disagree with the citizens committee and township board on what the most appropriate long-term solution would be. The WRD, supported by the MMDHD, would like to see Riverdale install a municipal wastewater treatment system to ensure no further septic problems occur in the community. And in addition to the original 12 properties, the departments have raised concerns over another 68 properties in Riverdale that have undocumented septic tanks, and wish to see each of those systems officially evaluated.

Riverdale and Seville Township are firmly against installing a community-wide system, as the cost would be over twice as many thousands of dollars per household than the cost to reinstall or update a septic system. The Riverdale Citizens Sewer Committee and the Seville Township board have worked extensively to convince the WRD that fixing the individual failing septic systems would be more than adequate to stop the pollution. Among other measures, they've gone door-to-door, completed hundreds of water quality tests and commissioned an engineering study to examine the feasibility of a permanent septic solution. And in regards to the 68 properties Lombard contends that it's "not illegal" to not have a permit on file for an existing system, pointing out that these undocumented systems exist throughout the county and the state.

The upcoming meeting will be an attempt for all parties to get on the same page months after communication stagnated. But Lombard feels that even before the COVID-19 delay, this process has dragged out far too long. "It's infuriating to a majority of us that we're still at this point without a clean bill of health.... We've stopped [the pollution], and want to move on," Lombard said.

For the WRD, Meyer said that her department is "open to any plan that addresses the failing septic systems in a timely manner, while complying with our state's rules and regulations." At the same time, the WRD wants to ensure that the solution is both long-term and thorough so that "people do not have to be concerned about potential impacts to their drinking water wells and can safely recreate in the Pine River."

"We want to determine what is best for the citizens of Riverdale both financially, and to protect public health and the environment," she said.

Liz Braddock, environmental health director with the MMDHD, wanted to emphasize that her department is

“not against the community” of Riverdale.

“We want to come up with a long-term plan,” she said. “We just have a difference of opinion.”

Dine-In or Carry-Out? Whichever You Prefer, Local Eateries Put COVID Safety First



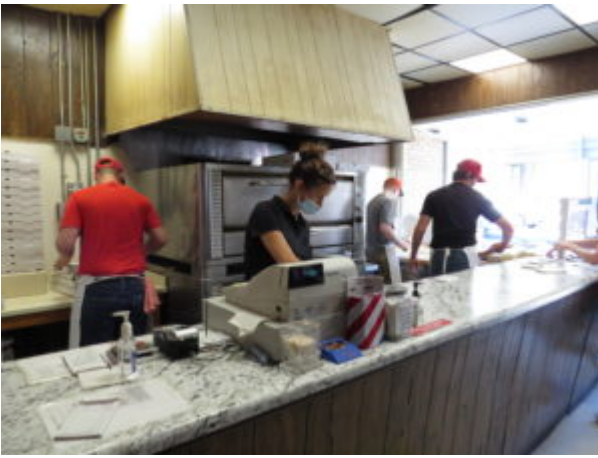
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Kristen McMath hands menus to Steve and Mary Thelen, who enjoyed their first restaurant meal since the beginning of the pandemic at Bravehearts in Alma last Friday evening. Restaurants across Gratiot have each implemented a COVID-19 response plan to keep their employees and patrons safe. (Herald photo – Selmon)



Owner Merlin Gable smiles under his mask at The Hearthstone Oven in Ithaca, which began welcoming in-person diners back last month.



Workers at Pizza Sam are busy prepping pizzas for carry-out. The Alma restaurant has opted to keep their dining room closed for the time being.

By Emma Selmon
Herald Staff Writer

After nearly three months of COVID-19 closure, many of Gratiot's bars and restaurants are once again open for in-person patrons. These businesses have been able to open their dining rooms to the public since June 8, though some county eateries have opted to stick to takeout-only operations.

A number of county residents have been out to eat at local restaurants since then, but others are still hesitant to dine outside of their homes — especially after at least 170 COVID-19 cases have been linked to an outbreak at an East Lansing bar in June.

But Gratiot County doesn't really have establishments like Harper's Restaurant and Brewpub, a "college town bar" with a dance floor, said Liz Braddock, environmental [health](#) director with the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD). In fact, most of Gratiot's bars were not affected by last week's executive order closing establishments like Harper's, indoor bars whose alcohol sales account for over 70 percent of their gross receipts. Braddock said that the "mom-and-pop" bars and restaurants found in Gratiot's communities are not thought to be major sources of community COVID-19 spread — and if restaurant employees and patrons all follow the safety measures put in place, Gratiot's families can enjoy a meal at their favorite local restaurants with peace of mind.

"If restaurants have a COVID response plan that is adequate and is being implemented on a daily basis, then the restaurants are protecting their employees, and protecting the clients, from COVID spread," Braddock said. In Gratiot County, there are 126 licensed food service facilities, and the MMDHD has always played an integral role in ensuring the safety of these establishments. Even in pre-pandemic times, they conduct twice-annual unannounced inspections to provide health and safety information and to make sure that restaurants are "following good practices to provide safe food to the community," Braddock said.

And as the COVID shutdowns changed restaurant operations, the MMDHD's role in restaurant safety evolved as well. From offering advice and guidance for curbside pickup to sharing a dining room reopening toolkit, the department has been instrumental in helping these businesses safely navigate the pandemic.

In-person inspections were suspended when dining rooms first closed on March 16, but the MMDHD has continued to provide these businesses with COVID-19 safety information and resources via phone and email throughout the COVID crisis. And now that restrictions have been lifted, in-person inspections have resumed with a renewed focus on COVID-19 policies and procedures.

COVID-19 safety procedures differ in some ways from typical food safety measures due to the nature of the way the disease spreads. Unlike the typical illnesses restaurants focus on preventing, COVID-19 is not foodborne, meaning "there is no evidence that COVID is spread through food," Braddock said.

Instead, COVID-19 is spread through personal interactions, via respiratory droplets released when individuals cough, talk, or sneeze. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the more an individual interacts with others and the longer they interact with others, the risk of COVID-19 spread is heightened.

So the concern of COVID-19 spread in restaurants comes not from the food itself, but from the gathering of

people for prolonged periods of time. But with proper precautions put in place, this risk can be greatly reduced. The MMDHD requires each restaurant to have a COVID-19 response plan tailored the unique operations of their facility. Braddock said that one of the most important aspects of a restaurant's COVID response is maintaining social distancing. Under current guidelines, restaurant capacity must be reduced by 50 percent, and party seating must be separated by at least six feet.

It's also important for employees to wear masks, and for patrons to wear masks when they are out of their seats, she said. Additionally, employees must be screened daily for COVID-19 symptoms, travel and potential exposures. Increased sanitization of frequently-touched surfaces is also important.

Braddock said that while the MMDHD has received some complaints from patrons with concerns about COVID-19 protocols in food service facilities, for the most part, Gratiot's bars and restaurants have done a good job implementing these safety procedures.

"I think the restaurants have adapted well to the requirements that the executive orders put on them," she said.

Among the local restaurants who have reopened their dining room is The Hearthstone Oven in Ithaca. Owner Merlin Gable said that the business has taken several additional steps to reduce the risk of COVID-19, including installing touchless faucets in the restrooms and adding outdoor seating options.

Throughout the pandemic, Hearthstone's bakery and takeout services have remained open for business. Gable said their frozen casseroles were particularly popular throughout the shutdown. And since they've reopened for in-person meals, the business has seen a steady stream of dine-in customers.

"Basically, our June has been like any other June," Gable said. "We haven't been making up for lost time, so to speak, but our sales have been steady with previous Junes."

Though they are limited to half their normal capacity, Gable said that Hearthstone has not yet had any issues with exceeding their limited seating. And for the most part, he thinks that the COVID-19 changes shouldn't be too burdensome to maintain.

"We haven't ever been overwhelmed yet with people crowding to come in, so as long as people are patient, it should work," he said.

Bravehearts in Alma also hasn't run into any capacity issues since they've reopened. Although Bravehearts was not affected by last week's executive order, owner Charles Chapman thinks that "most people are still pretty cautious about going out to restaurants." Even so, dine-in business has been good, and patrons have been glad to be back, he said.

"Everybody's ecstatic," Chapman said. "The first week we were open, we were very busy, even at half-capacity."

Chapman said that customers who are not comfortable visiting Bravehearts in person have still been supportive of the business, with many customers continuing to order takeout as they have throughout the shutdown.

And for another Alma business, Pizza Sam, carry-out is the only service they're offering. Because of the uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, the longtime Alma restaurant has chosen not to reopen their dining room for now.

Owner Vinnie Ortisi said that before the pandemic, carry-out made up about 70 percent of their sales, so when COVID-19 hit in March, "business really didn't change at all." Because their carry-out has been so successful, it's easier for the business to keep the dining room closed for the time being — especially if Michigan moves backwards in COVID-19 progress and has to shut down dining rooms again anyway, he said.

"We're very fortunate to be able to just kind of shut the restaurant inside down and still put out a good amount of pizzas every day in order to stay busy," he said.

All three business owners said that for the most part, patrons have been understanding about the COVID-19 safety protocols, though each has encountered a handful of customers who aren't thrilled about the changes. But as Hearthstone's Gable pointed out, these measures are put in place for the well-being of the community, and local restaurants are "all doing the best [they] can" to safely serve customers in these uncertain times.

"With the difficulties small businesses are currently facing, we just ask customers to be patient, nonjudgmental, and support local business," he said.

Montcalm County seeing more coronavirus cases

Stanton churches,
hardware store close
due to positive tests

ELISABETH WALDON
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Montcalm County, which has seen positive coronavirus cases barely trickle in since March, is seeing an increase in cases as summer settles in.

From mid-March to the end of May, the county had a total of 70 cases, with one related death. From June 1 to July 1,

the county saw 20 more cases for a total of 90.

And then from June 29 through the Fourth of July weekend, 23 new cases were reported at multiple locations throughout Montcalm County. There are currently an estimated total of 113 positive cases from March to date in Montcalm County.

"These are just the cases that we know about," Mid-Michigan District Health Department Health Officer Marcus Cheatham told the Daily News. "There are actually many more that we have never contacted about. All of the new cases have exposed many more people so we can expect to see many more cases in the

coming weeks.

"What we are seeing is it is spreading because people are not masking and social distancing," he said. "It is being spread through birthday parties, graduations, barbecues, parties ... businesses that aren't being safe and things like that. They aren't masking or social distancing and it's causing our numbers to jump. We have a couple of cases of people who were sick, they knew they had symptoms, and they went to work anyway and they've infected people. So some folks just aren't following good public health advice.

"I think the message is no matter where you are going, take precautions," he said. "Wear a mask indoors and out-

doors and put plenty of space between you and other people. The situation is not normal yet, so be careful."

Rolston Hardware in Stanton suspended all in-store shopping as of Sunday due to a positive test.

"We have recently been exposed to COVID-19," owners Eric and Jen Rolston wrote in a Facebook post. "As of now, pending test results, we will be at the store to offer contact-free curbside pickup only. This has not been an easy decision as we know that you, our valuable customers, rely on us to provide products and services that maintain daily func-

Continues on Page 3

Montcalm County seeing uptick in coronavirus cases

Continued from Page 1

tions at your home Please know this tough decision was made after much prayer and recommendations made by our health department.

"At this time, neither my husband nor I have tested positive for COVID," Jen added in the Sunday post. "We are simply trying to use precaution to protect those we care about."

On Tuesday, the health department announced an individual at Rolston Hardware had tested positive for the coronavirus and other employees are undergoing testing. Members of the public who visited the hardware store on June 23, 24, 26, 27, or the morning of June 30 may have been exposed, according to the health department.

"During our investigation of the case, it was determined the risk of exposure to COVID-19 to in this situation is similar to that in the general community," a health department press release stated. "However, it was felt the patrons of this store should be notified so they can self-monitor for symptoms. The facility is working closely with the health department and has voluntarily closed for a brief period while this situation resolves and to allow time for proper cleaning and disinfection."

Three Stanton churches also temporarily closed their doors due to the local cases.

Pine Grove Church had reopened for corporate worship on May 24, but Pastor Bruce Anna decided to close his church on July 2 until July 9 due to several local positive cases. Anna himself felt a bit under the weather and decided to take a coronavirus test, which came back negative.

"It's really difficult but we want people to be safe," said Anna of the decision to temporarily close church. "The people who are ill were not in church last Sunday when we were open. They did not feel well and they did test positive. There were a couple of positive tests and we were like, we're going to wait two weeks. We're being very pro-active, not reactive."

First Congregational Church, which had reopened May 3, was closed last Sunday after Pastor Jamey Nichols learned on Saturday morning that a family friend had tested positive for the coronavirus.

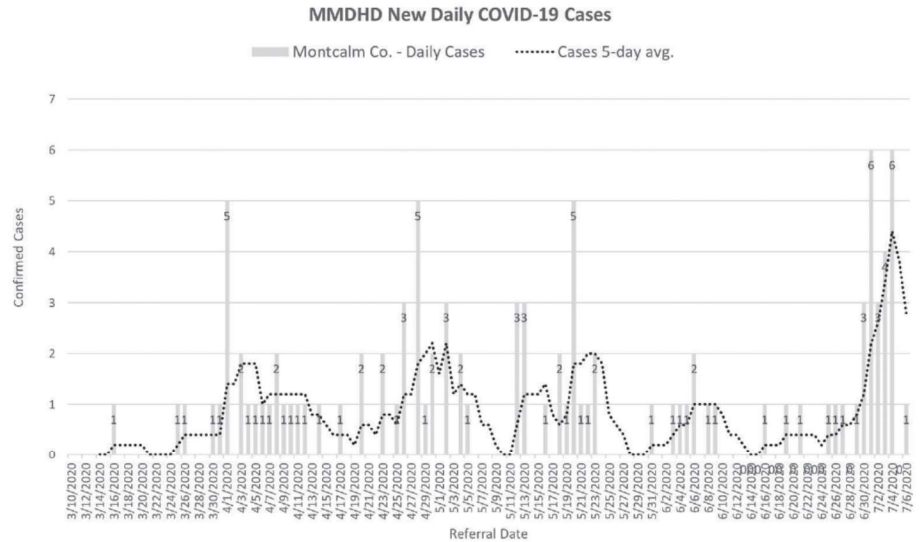
"Because of that last-minute information, I canceled the service as a precaution," Nichols said.

Nichols said church will resume this Sunday as long as no new local cases are reported. He noted church is an "essential activity of life."

"If you can go to the grocery store, you can go to church," he said. "One is physical food and one is spiritual food — and man does not live by bread alone."

Trinity Church, which had reopened May 24, was closed July 5 due to several positive cases in the community, along with pending tests and additional people who appeared to be exhibiting symptoms but had not yet been tested. Trinity Church officials could not be reached for comment.

The most common symptoms of



Montcalm County has seen an increase in coronavirus cases over the Fourth of July weekend. — Submitted graphic | Mid-Michigan District Health Department

COVID-19 to monitor for are fever, cough, fatigue, loss of sense of smell, shortness of breath, muscle aches, headache and sore throat, according to the health department. If you develop any of these symptoms, testing is recommended. You can find a testing site at mi.gov/coronavirustest or by calling the COVID-19 Hotline at 888-535-6136 and pressing 1.

"We are seeing increases in new cases and new outbreaks and clusters of cases of COVID-19," MMDHD Medical Director Dr. Jennifer Morse said. "This is a sobering reminder that this pandemic is far from being over and could overwhelm us again at any time. It is more important than ever to take the only steps we have to keep COVID-19 from getting worse. That includes staying home when ill, avoiding crowded areas, keeping at least 6 feet apart from others, wearing a mask when in public, covering coughs and sneezes, and frequent hand washing."

IONIA COUNTY CASES

Ionia County had a total of 148 cases at the end of May with four related deaths. Ionia County saw 24 new cases reported between June 1 and July 1 for a total of 172. The county's total is currently 182 cases.

Health Officer Ken Bowen said of the 24 new cases in June, over half of those came in the second half of June, so we are seeing a slight increase in cases. As of the end of last week, our percentage of positive cases had also increased slightly over the previous two weeks. That second indicator is much more important to us, and we will be re-evaluating those numbers this week."

The Ionia County Health Department has provided test updates via Ionia County Central Dispatch E911's Facebook page after the health department's Facebook page was "apparently hacked," according to Bowen.

"We had been unable to verify our location which is a requirement for having

an organizational page like ours," he said. "We could not figure out why, and then one of my staff noted that our page indicated log-ins from another geographic location. Shortly thereafter, we began receiving notifications that someone was using the page to log-in to other sites. We deleted the page and have been monitoring to see if anyone tries to re-start it. I hope to have a new page up soon."

LONGTERM CARE DEATHS

While state of Michigan numbers show just one coronavirus-related death for Montcalm County, the state's long-term care database shows three coronavirus-related deaths at Mission Point in Greenville (michigan.gov/coronavirus/0,9753,7-406-98163_98173-526911--,00.html).

MMDHD officials said these three deaths were people from other counties who died from the coronavirus while in Montcalm County.

"Until very recently, Mission Point was a hub location and accepted residents from other counties on a temporary basis," MMDHD Public Information Officer Leslie Kinnee told the Daily News. "The plan was for those residents to eventually return to their home county/facility. Unfortunately, they passed away before that could happen. The resident's home address is where that death is counted."

Nearby Mission Point in Cedar Springs had 11 coronavirus-related deaths.

RECOVERIES

Ionia and Montcalm health departments have not been reporting any numbers for local recoveries.

"I have yet to see a good definition of what a 'recovery' is, so we have been reluctant," Bowen said.

The state of Michigan currently lists 52,841 people as recovered out of a total of 66,627 positive cases.

Lakeview Area News

Thursday, July 9, 2020

COVID-19 at Rolston Hardware, Stanton

**By Leslie Kinnee
Public Information
Officer, Mid-Michigan
District Health Dept.**

The Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) has confirmed that an individual at Rolston Hardware, 100 W Main St. in Stanton, has tested positive for COVID-19. Other staff members are undergoing testing. Members of the public that visited this store June 23, 24, 26, 27, or the morning of June 30 may have been exposed. During our investigation of the case, it was determined the risk of exposure to COVID-19 to in this situation is similar to that in the general community. However, it was felt the patrons of this store should be notified so they can self-monitor for symptoms. The facility is working closely with the health department and have voluntarily closed for a brief period while this situation resolves and to allow time for proper cleaning and

disinfection.

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 to monitor for are fever, cough, fatigue, loss of sense of smell, shortness of breath, muscle aches, headache, and sore throat. If you develop any of these symptoms, testing for COVID-19 illness is recommended. You can find a testing site at www.mi.gov/coronavirustest or by calling the COVID-19 Hotline at 888-535-6136, press 1.

“We are seeing increases in new cases and new outbreaks and clusters of cases of COVID-19”, says Dr. Jennifer Morse, Medical Director for Mid-Michigan District Health Department. “This is a sobering reminder that this pandemic is far from being over and could overwhelm us again at any time. It is more important than every to take the only steps we have to keep COVID-19 from getting worse. That includes staying home when ill, avoiding crowded areas, keeping at

least 6 feet apart from others, wearing a mask when in public, covering coughs and sneezes, and frequent hand washing.”

To date, MMDHD has had a total of 463 cases of COVID-19: 394 confirmed cases and 69 probable case and of COVID-19 and 26 deaths in its jurisdiction:

Clinton County: 206 confirmed cases and 50 probable cases and 12 deaths

Gratiot County: 85 confirmed cases and 10 probable cases and 13 deaths

Montcalm County: 103 confirmed cases and 9 probable cases and 1 death

Mid-Michigan District Health Department continues to perform contact tracing for all identified COVID-19 positive individuals in its jurisdiction.

For updated information, visit www.mmdhd.org or www.michigan.gov/coronavirus.

‘Risk, uncertainty, unknowns’

Danish Festival, Lakeview Summerfest, Stanton Old Fashioned Days and Trufant Jubilee — all likely canceled

CORY SMITH
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As positive cases of the coronavirus in Michigan continue to increase, organizers are losing hope for late-summer festivals.

Four area summertime staples, all of which had previously scaled back or postponed events in the hope they could still go on, have since announced the cancellation of those festivals.

DANISH FESTIVAL

The Danish Festival Executive Board met Thursday evening for its monthly board meeting; however, the deadline for this story came before that meeting occurring.

The Daily News spoke in advance of that meeting with Danish Festival Executive Director Kristin Griffes, who said the board was likely to vote to cancel the 56th annual Danish Festival, which was scheduled for Aug. 20-23, with an official decision to be announced on the Danish Festival's Facebook page today.

"I foresee our board voting to cancel the festival tonight," Griffes said. "We're just not comfortable organizing a scaled-back festival without being in the next phase of the governor's Safe Start plan."

Griffes was referencing Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's "Michigan Safe Start Plan",

which currently has the Grand Rapids region — which includes Greenville — in Phase 4. Whitmer said she was originally hopeful the state would be moved into Phase 5 by the Fourth of July weekend, however, an uptick in positive cases has prevented that from happening.

"We would have to be in Phase 5 for us to be able to have several hundred people in our vendor areas," Griffes said. "We don't know what phase we will be in, in late August, but in that six-week time frame before the festival, a lot happens, and it's not fair to us, our contractors and our vendors to keep pushing it out when the likelihood of it happening is so slim."

Griffes said as the board contemplated canceling or postponing events over the last few weeks, no decision has come easy.

Continues on Page 2

Summer festivals all likely canceled

Continued from Page 1

"No one is more disappointed in having to make this decision than me and our board — we live for this festival," she said. "All the preparation leading into this, that went into it, it is really disappointing to see that work not deliver results, but we know the risks just outweigh anything else ... there's too much of a risk, uncertainty and unknowns."

Griffes said interest in this year's festival from vendors was outpacing numbers from last year, with about 90 vendors having already registered for the festival's downtown artisan market. She is now hoping that interest will carry through into next year.

"We're really hoping that pushes us into 2021 so we can then have a thriving downtown and festival," she said.

Griffes said the board is still hopeful to hold the annual Open-Air Breakfast normally held on Cass Street from 7 to 11 a.m. July 19, but with changes in place. If held, it will become a drive-thru event at First Congregational Church of Greenville, with only aebleskivers being served and cash being accepted as payment.

"We are running on a tight budget for that and we may be short on volunteers," Griffes added.

One new festival event will be occurring this summer — the Danish Festival Porch Parade.

"We are asking our community members to celebrate with us by decorating their porch, yard or window to bring a smile and sense of community celebration to your neighborhood," Griffes said. "The theme will be anything Danish."

There will be two categories for the entries — daytime and evening — with a winner crowned in each category.

"Anyone can drive around and look at them. We hope this will give a good sense of community," Griffes said.

Additionally, a fundraiser for the festival will be held at Castle Brewing Co. in Greenville on Aug. 22, via the brewery's outdoor beer garden.

"We'll have live music and we're looking to sell 100 tickets," Griffes said. "If we move into the next phase, we will sell more."

The annual Danish Dash event has also transitioned into an online marathon.

For more information about these events, visit the Danish Festival Facebook page or the festival's website at www.danishfestival.org.

LAKEVIEW SUMMERFEST

On Tuesday it was announced that Lakeview Summerfest, originally postponed from June 19-21 to Aug. 6-8, will be canceled.

"We had to make the hard decision to cancel Summerfest for 2020," The Lakeview Festival Committee said on its Facebook page. "So many events before and after ours have been canceled. We kicked the can down the road hoping to pull off a great weekend in August. With the ever-changing restrictions and confusion of phases/regions and some input from the Mid-Michigan District Health Department, we made the decision unanimously."

Organizers are now hopeful the Lakeview community can look forward to the fourth annual Fall Fest, scheduled for Oct. 3, and the Christmas in Lakeview celebration on Dec. 5.

Summerfest organizers were able to rebook the bands and other attractions for this year's festival for June 2021.

For those interested in joining the Summerfest committee, it meets the first Tuesday of each month at 6:15 p.m., rotating between the Alley Cat and McKenna's restaurants, with membership at \$12 per year.

STANTON OLD FASHIONED DAYS

Stanton Old Fashioned Days announced its committee unanimously decided Wednesday evening to cancel this year's festival, which would have been Aug. 13-16.

"This decision was one met with opposition, both positive and negative, but the end result was we could not guarantee the safety of festival workers, attended, and most importantly, our vendors and sponsors of the festival," Old Fashioned Days Committee Chairman Steven VanHolstyn wrote in an email, adding that "safety and wellbeing" were paramount in the decision.

"Since the pandemic first began, we stepped up our meetings to monitor just what this could mean for Stanton Old Fashioned Days in August of 2020. No matter how many times we met, governor's addresses we watched or emails we exchanged with local and state officials, no one could tell us for certain what our festival could look like, who would attend and

participate, or if we would even be allowed to host our annual event.

"In a small community like Stanton, we are not immune to any tragedy or significant event that would affect our families, friends and neighbors, including a National health crisis such as COVID-19," he continued. "Even with lower cases reported in our region, it would seem very probable we might all know someone who tested positive or became sick from the virus. We all have been affected in one way or another. And because of that, we take your health and the safety of others very seriously."

"Please know making this decision weighed heavily on the (committee) and we fought hard to try and coordinate some modified, scaled-down version of a festival in order to get our community back outside," he said. "COVID-19 has impacted each and every one of us in some form or another and our hope was to be the first festival to actually not be canceled as a result of the pandemic. Unfortunately, we just could not guarantee a safe event for the public and you as our supporters."

"While this decision may have been inevitable, it was not for lack of effort," he continued. "Members had previously developed alternate plans to try and hold a safe weekend by downsizing or canceling many of the events and activities in order to minimize people's exposure to one another, yet still allow the public to get out and about. However, with the recent spike in cases in our area, we agreed we could no longer hold the festival and have the assurance of a safe environment for participants, vendors, sponsors, and our community."

VanHolstyn said plans and meetings are already in motion to host the 2021 Stanton Old Fashioned Days and the committee welcomes any ideas or volunteers and organizations that would like to help put on the festival for the community.

TRUFANT JUBILEE

The Trufant Jubilee Festival, scheduled for Sept. 6, has also been canceled.

"Unfortunately, we are canceling Jubilee this year," Kelli Medler of Jubilee wrote in an email. "We look forward to 2021."

The Daily News reached out to Trufant Area Chamber of Commerce President Jeff Miller for additional comment but did not receive a response before deadline.



A sign placed by the Mid-Michigan District Health Department at Loon Lake in Evergreen Township warns people of the dangers harmful algal blooms can cause. Loon Lake recently tested positive for algal blooms. — DN Photo | Brandon Schreur

Potentially harmful algal blooms found in Loon Lake

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EVERGREEN TOWNSHIP — A lake in Evergreen Township is harboring potentially harmful algal blooms.

According to Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) Environmental Health Director Liz Braddock, an initial field test at Loon Lake, located approximately two miles northwest of Crystal Lake, indicates the presence of algal toxins recently came back above the recommended level.

“MMDHD has posted a warning on the lake that residents and visitors on the lake should avoid any areas of discolorations or scums and also pets should be kept away from these areas of the lake,” Braddock told the Daily News. “Do not allow children or pets to play in areas where there is scum or algae present.”

Algal blooms, Braddock explained,

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Algal blooms in Loon Lake

Continued from Page 1A

occur when algae multiply in an area very quickly.

"Algal blooms can form in waters that are rich in the nutrients algae need to grow, such as harmful algal blooms (also known as HABs) result from the rapid growth, or bloom, of algae that can cause harm to animals, people or the local environment," Braddock said.

Blooms can look like foam, scum or mats on the surface of the water and often come in different colors.

"A harmful algal bloom can cause harm by producing toxins that can poison humans, fish, seabirds, aquatic animals, livestock, wildfire and household pets (such as dogs) that are near the water, drink the water or swim in the water," she added. "They can also cause illness when a person or animal eats fish or shellfish contaminated with algal toxins, also known as microcystin."

Testing at Loon Lake indicated that the presence of microcystin is above the recommended level of 8 microgram/liter limit. Braddock says Michigan's state lab will now be running confirmatory testing on Loon Lake that could take an additional week to complete.

The MMDHD was first notified about potentially harmful algae blooms the Evergreen Township lake by local resident Mark Hetherington.

"We asked him to contact the State Environmental Assistance Center to report the algal bloom," Braddock explained. "This was the first report I am aware of for this lake in recent years."

Hetherington, who has lived on Loon Lake for almost 12 years, told the Daily News that when he noticed the algae blooms, he contacted the Michigan Department of Environmental, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE), as well as the MMDHD.

"I've never seen it like this before," Hetherington said. "Every once in a great while, you might see a little bit on the shoreline, but it almost always clears up on the same day. I did some research into it and found they can be toxic to animals and people. I've got both animals and people running around the channel next to my house, so I was concerned."

Worried that this year's increase in blooms could be caused by some form of pollution, Hetherington said he wanted to get someone testing the water sooner rather than later.

"My biggest complaint during all of this was that there was nobody (immediately) available to take care of this," Hetherington said. "(EGLE) is so meticulous about people doing things and getting permits to take care of this and that. Nobody came out to address the

concern when I initially reported it."

Braddock said her office is notified of harmful algal blooms from the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services.

"Members of the public can report blooms to the state by email or by phone, and EGLE staff will coordinate testing at the site," she said. "Based on the testing results, our office will post warnings regarding the risk of exposure to harmful algal blooms and advise residents to stay away from harmful algal blooms."

Citizens concerned about algal blooms can report suspicious-looking algae to EGLE by calling the Environmental Assistance Center at 1-800-662-9278 or sending an email with a picture of the bloom to AlgaeBloom@Michigan.gov.

According to Braddock, there has been one other report of potentially harmful blooms in Montcalm County this year.

"We had earlier in the season received a notification from EGLE that they were investigating a report from a lake in Pierson Township," she said. "It was tested, but not toxin-producing algae was present. Last year, EGLE investigated one potential case in Montcalm County, but no harmful algal blooms were identified."

Rashes, hives or skin blisters are all common symptoms those who had skin contact with blooms may experience. Breathing lake water mist from recreational activities or lawn-watering can cause runny eyes and nose, sore throat, asthma-like symptoms and allergic reactions. Swallowing water contaminated by blooms can cause severe diarrhea, vomiting, abdominal pain, abnormal liver function, kidney toxicity, weakness, salivation, tingling fingers, numbness, dizziness, difficulties breathing or death.

Those who think they may have been exposed to harmful blooms should remove people from the exposures and seek medical treatment if symptoms occur.

Pets who may have been exposed should be rinsed off with clean, fresh water and should seek veterinary treatment as soon as possible.

Braddock says the best way to avoid harmful blooms is to not drink untreated surface water regardless of whether or not blooms are present, obey posted signs for public health warnings, avoid water recreation in areas of a lake where algal blooms are present, avoid watering lawns, gardens or golf courses with water from impacted lakes, avoid the use of algaecides and limiting or avoiding eating fish from impacted areas.

Daily News

Tuesday, July 14, 2020



Fresh Start Fitness at 406 S. Lafayette St. in Greenville has continued to remain open in defiance of executive orders issued by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer. As a result, owner Chris Reisner has received 20 citations to date from the Greenville Department of Public Safety; however, police recently stopped ticketing him. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

'We'll wait and see'

Greenville police stop ticketing Fresh Start after 20 citations

CORY SMITH

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GREENVILLE — A Greenville gym has been issued 20 citations by local police while continuing to operate despite Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's executive order.

On March 16, Fresh Start Fitness, located at 406 S. Lafayette St., closed its doors per an executive order from Whitmer due to the coronavirus pandemic.

After nearly three months of being closed, Fresh Start Fitness owner Chris Reisner made the decision to do a "soft open" of his workout facility on June 10 — allegedly in violation of Whitmer's executive order.

Fresh Start Fitness opened its doors on June 15 and has remained open to members only every day since.

The Greenville Department of Public Safety (GDPS) began issuing misdemeanor citations with a possible penalty of \$500, but Fresh Start Fitness has continued to op-

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Greenville police stop ticketing Fresh Start

Continued from Page 1

erate 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Reisner has been issued 20 citations to date, according to GDPS Director Dennis Magirl.

Reisner is currently scheduled to appear in Montcalm County District Court on Aug. 6.

Efforts to reach Reisner for comment in this article were unsuccessful, but Reisner has previously stated he does not believe he is breaking any laws, adding he is not at liberty to speak on the specifics of the case and investigation at this time.

Going forward, Magirl said Reisner will receive no additional citations.

"After talking with my detective, the issuing of tickets is something that we're going to try to get away from right now," Magirl said. "It's overburdening the court system. They have been receiving this large amount of tickets for the same offense, and we were requested to stop issuing tickets and instead present a case listing the dates they've been open. We will present the judge with the total number of days that he was in violation, which will give the judge a lot of latitude, instead of sorting through all of these citations."

Magirl said his department will present the Montcalm County Prosecutor's Office with a tally of how many days Fresh Start Fitness has been open.

"We will leave it in the hands of the

prosecutor and judge to make the appropriate and legal decisions," he said.

Montcalm County Prosecutor Andrea Krause said each of the 20 citations issued thus far will be considered.

"Each citation will move through the court system. After arraignment there will be a pretrial conference and if no resolution then it will be set for trial," she said.

Magirl said his goal is not to escalate matters, especially with new requirements issued by Whitmer via executive order declaring that all individuals must wear face coverings when inside businesses.

"We don't want to escalate anything further than what it is," Magirl said. "We are looking to the judges and prosecutors to make these decisions. We are enforcing the laws and executive orders as best we can right now. The judge will be aware of how long they have been in violation. We'll wait and see what action comes out of that."

Greenville City Manager George Bosanic said he supports the police-issued citations for the alleged violations, adding that he personally feels for those businesses in the city that have been forced to remain closed.

"Executive orders are made by the governor and the expectation is that law enforcement, at all levels, will enforce them," he said. "Public Safety is doing their level-best, to do that. From the city's perspective, as difficult as it is for our businesses,

it is equally as difficult for us. We appreciate, under these unusual circumstances, those that are working with us and are trying to abide, doing their best, despite the loss in revenue. We appreciate that. We appreciate those businesses that are working with us in maintaining compliance.

Mid Michigan District Health Department Health Officer Marcus Cheatham said fitness centers are considered by health experts to be a potential high-risk area for the coronavirus to spread.

"The reason that Michigan had gotten its COVID-19 cases down so low — at one point less than 100 in a day — was because people were complying," he said. "Now the numbers are going back up because people have stopped complying and it's a really serious problem. Fresh Start is not respecting the health and safety of their employees or customers."

Cheatham said at this time the health department is not in a position to take any action against Fresh Start.

"We technically don't have the authority to enforce state emergency declarations, what we can do is declare them a health threat to others," he said. "Our evidence would be that someone could get sick with COVID, but as far as we know, no one has yet at Fresh Start Fitness. It would take a lot of energy, depending on the judge, for us to follow through with all of that, so I'm glad the prosecuting attorney is looking at this."