

Coronavirus...from Page 2A

guidelines and refresher training for all agencies, as well as assisting with training that targets some areas of concern," Walls said. "I definitely want to thank him for the time and effort he put in."

Personal protective equipment consists of items like masks, gowns, gloves, respirators, suits, etc.

In his ongoing planning and coordination efforts, Walls is in constant conversations with local stakeholders, the Georgia Emergency Management Agency and others. He continues to recommend people follow CDC and Department of Public Health guidelines concerning the virus.

Turning once again to examine the big picture, it looks like a lot of what could be happening next is millions of people across the U.S. having to stay home, which may help them avoid the virus and therefore limit its spread, but it won't protect people's jobs, businesses and incomes.

To combat this problem while simultaneously trying to shore up battered financial markets, the White House and Congress have worked in a bipartisan manner over the last week to forward a nearly \$2 trillion proposed stimulus package to provide broad economic support to businesses and individuals across the land.

The details of that package, including which households can expect what kind of benefit in their time of

need, were still being worked out at press time.

In Georgia, the Department of Labor has revised its rules for unemployment, requiring employers "to file partial claims on behalf of their employees whenever it is necessary to temporarily reduce work hours or there is no work available for a short period."

This measure should provide at least some relief, as here, there and everywhere, local businesses are either shutting their doors to the public and working over the phone and/or email; closing up shop all together; or reducing hours and adjusting services to protect customers, employees and the community from the novel coronavirus.

Affected businesses include local restaurants, many of which have voluntarily closed their dining areas to the public and are encouraging folks to order drive-through, takeout or delivery.

For a list of restaurant changes in the wake of coronavirus, check out the "Visit Lake Chatuge" Facebook page.

Small businesses rely on regular foot traffic and interaction with the community, which is especially impactful on the local economy here, as Towns County and her businesses receive so much revenue via tourism benefiting the restaurant, retail, housing, hospitality, travel, entertainment and other industries.

This includes Georgia

Mountain Fairgrounds activities, which have been either rescheduled, like the Drifters, the Coasters and the Platters concert from March 28 to Sept. 26, or canceled, like the 2020 Georgia Mountain Eggfest.

That's why the current economic environment is presenting such a challenge – federal and state officials are advising isolation and social distancing as two of the most important preventive prescriptions for COVID-19.

On top of the official recommendations, many people appear to be panicking from a lack of information about the virus, and there's a proliferation of rumors and misinformation on social media and elsewhere.

These factors have conspired to produce a sudden, previously unheard-of decline in customer traffic across the small business spectrum, locally and abroad, causing crushing circumstances for many business owners and, in turn, their employees.

Business owners and their employees affected by the virus' impact on the local economy should reach out to the Georgia Department of Labor and the Small Business Association to see what their options are in terms of maintaining income and capital for continued operations.

The story is quite different with grocery stores, many of which have had to begin rationing certain items

like milk, eggs, bread, fresh meat and chicken, toilet paper, paper towels, bleach, hand sanitizer, Clorox wipes, etc., to limit the amount customers can purchase at a time.

These decisions are being made largely at the corporate level for now, where supply chains are being tightly controlled to prevent hoarding and empty shelves. The overarching message seems to be that everything is OK; the trucks will keep coming with supplies, so there's no need to panic-buy.

And that's certainly a message local officials want to broadcast as well: Don't panic – everyone is in this together, and everyone will pull through.

"I ask that you remain calm and continue to practice the recommended guidelines such as frequent handwashing and social distancing," Commissioner Bradshaw said. "I am optimistic that this will soon pass, and we will be able to get back to our normal course of business and enjoy the freedoms allotted us by the sacrifices of our military personnel both past and present."

Of course, it's impossible to gauge in the present moment the ultimate impact of all these voluntary and government-based responses. However, health experts are confident that, together, the measures will spread out the rate of infection over time, thereby making it easier for American communities to care for their sick.

Thankfully, there's still plenty of positive news out there, including stories of community successes in the face of adversity, right here in Towns County.

Though many working parents will have to continue caring for their children instead of going to their day jobs after Gov. Kemp closed all schools through at least March 31, Towns County Schools has stayed busy providing meals to children were used to getting much of their nutrition on campus.

Meals for any children 18 and under are available for pickup at the Enota Apartments, Towns County Senior Center and Lower Hightower Baptist Church from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Monday through Friday during the closure.

Perhaps good news to many kids' ears, the Georgia Department of Education announced Friday that "educators, parents and students can expect that no state testing – to include Georgia Milestones, GAA 2.0, and GKIDS – will be administered in Georgia this school year."

And the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC has been coordinating with various community partners in its five-county service area to provide

public Wi-Fi hotspots, making it easier for kids without readily available internet to do their online schoolwork outside the classroom.

The Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds is one of the host sites for the hotspots, and General Manager Hilda Thomason said she and the Fairgrounds were excited to partner with the EMC to provide the service for kids and adults alike.

Two other EMC public hotspots are available in Towns County, at Dollar General Store at U.S. 76 and Sunnyside Road, where users should park on side of the store; and at Macedonia Baptist Church in the front parking lot.

"In order to access the Wi-Fi service, simply look for the Wireless SSID named 'Student' and choose 'connect,'" the EMC said. "This service will work with laptops, tablets, cellphones and other Wi-Fi enabled devices."

For a full list of other

Wi-Fi hotspots available around town, visit the "Towns County Schools" Facebook page.

In positive local business news, in addition to continuing to make product for its customers in numerous states, Granddaddy Mimm's Moonshine Distillery has entered into partnerships with two other Georgia companies to produce alcohol for much-needed hand sanitizer.

"The process is basically the same as producing alcohol for our moonshines," Granddaddy Mimm's owner Tommy Townsend said. "We're happy we can keep the distillery working in these hard times and provide a product whose end result can help people stay healthy."

Additional COVID-19 resources include coronavirus.gov, gov.georgia.gov, https://www.fema.gov/coronavirus-rumor-control, and coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html.

Census...from Page 1A

program, Medicaid, the Title VIII programs – there are about 130 federal programs that get funded based on census numbers."

And census figures could also affect the apportionment of federal and state legislative seats that are population-based.

For example, should Georgia's population show a big enough increase between the 2010 and 2020 censuses, the state could actually pick up additional congressional seats moving forward, which would mean greater representation on the national stage.

"The census numbers are used to reapportion Congress every 10 years," Malone said. "In 2021, you will see some reapportionment, and the Census Bureau is estimating that there are 10 states, primarily in

the Northeast and the West, that will lose congressional seats.

"There are seven states that (could) gain congressional seats, Texas perhaps gaining two and Florida gaining three."

The census is important for other reasons, too. An accurate count reflecting growth, for instance, could influence the economic decisions of entrepreneurs looking to decide where to start their businesses, which would mean jobs and investment in individual communities.

With the census going online and people being at home due to COVID-19, census numbers are expected to be higher this year, as people have more time to fill out the information and get it submitted.

"I would hope that this year the census will see a lot

of participation," Malone said. "In 2010, Towns County had the highest percentage of respondents in the state of Georgia.

"Union County had the fourth largest. So, we are pretty good about filling out the census in our two counties here. I'm hoping that we can get in the 95-plus percentage of respondents in our two counties because of the online portion."

Most people will have received their census letter by now, but if not, the Census Bureau will be sending multiple reminders in the coming weeks, and if all else fails, a census taker will come knocking.

For more information on the census, call Pat Malone at 404-630-7504 or visit 2020census.gov.

Sentencing Delay...from Page 1A

first arrested for prescription fraud in April 2015 in Fannin County. He was arrested again in February 2016 by the Union County Sheriff's Office, as were Mike Gowder and Heaton, in connection

with other prescription drug charges.

Regarding the outstanding state charges against the three men, which were brought prior to their federal indictments, Enotah Judicial Circuit District

Attorney Jeff Langley said previously he would make a decision about moving forward with local charges after the federal sentencing.

High Country Artisans support local school Art Programs



(L-R) front: Sylvia Garner, Art Teacher Union County Middle School, and Bob Scoda, Treasurer; back: Tom Chambers, Paul Grossmann, President, Mary Lengnick, Helena Grossmann, Secretary, Brenda Chambers, Assistance Treasurer, Danny Grojean and Leslie Grojean

At their March meeting the High Country Artisans,

Inc., coordinators of the Annual Butternut Creek Festival

were delighted to present the Union County School System with a generous check to support the art program.

In addition, a check will be given to Carol Knight, President of the Woody Gap School to assist with their art program. Carol was unable to attend the presentation due to an administrative meeting addressing the corona virus situation.

The long standing mission of the High Country Artisans is to promote arts and crafts in the community. The proceeds from the Annual Butternut Creek Festival are used to meet that goal.

This on-going financial aid program allows schools to provide art supplies to teachers, resulting in an array of creative projects developed by the children. NT(Mar25 Z14)CA

Union/Towns Volunteers monthly meeting

The Union/Towns Volunteers meet the first Monday of the month, 7 PM, at First United Methodist Church in Blairsville, GA. NT(Mar25 Z2)CA