

Community members focus on safety as virus spreads

By Jarrett Whitener
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The governor's shelter in place order is now in effect for Georgia, and residents have begun to react as the novel coronavirus continues its spread. "I think the shelter in place order has led to a little more panic in this community or even the state," said resident Tony Kelley at Ingles last week. "I'm not an expert on how everyone is reacting to this, and people look like they are safe here at least."

"People are considerate of each other, and I see them not hoarding the toilet paper as much as people think they are. I get that we run out of things because the stores are busy and suppliers need to distribute supplies, but it creates a lot of anger and selfishness."

"People are buying things they may not even need because they are scared. I'm worried, too. People are losing jobs for the time and worrying about money. People around us are getting sick. It is a confusing situation to be in, and it worries us to not have answers."

Some residents are afraid

of the changes the virus has brought to the area but believe there are ways to keep themselves from worrying too much.

"The virus is a scary thing to think about and people worry," said Betty Howard, who was shopping at Hiawassee Hardware last week. "I have taken some time to tend to my garden, and it really gives me something to do around the house."

"I think people are seeing this stuff on the news and online that makes them feel like they need to buy everything. I like to work around the house and care for my flowers because it helps take my mind off of this."

"People don't like being home much, but this could be an opportunity to try new things and set goals for yourself. If you sit around all day thinking about the virus, then you will only panic more."

Fortunately, residents in this community are used to working together to care for one another and ensure that people are staying healthy. Still, it's important to think of those who may require more help.

"Personally, I am con-

cerned for this older community," said Loraine Fields at Walgreens Pharmacy. "People are needing their medicine, and people are needing to go out and get things for their homes, but they can't because they put themselves at risk."

"We have had a case in Towns County now, and that just makes us a little more afraid, because we don't know where that person has been or who else might have it. People can go without symptoms for days, and that means it can be harder to detect until we have spread it too far."

"I'm worried about this, yes, but I also have faith in God that this will be okay and everything will work out in the end. My heart really goes out to those that are suffering in this time, and I only wish the best for their families and our community."

"Working together and working to make this go away is the only way to truly make it go away."

By keeping an eye on the virus and its developments, area residents can reduce the risk of spread and ensure that everyone stays as safe as possible.



Hiawassee Hardware is a popular place for people to get supplies for home projects as they stay indoors during the shelter-in-place order. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

"I can't speak on behalf of the community - I'm from over the mountain," said Stephen Woods of White County. "I just think people are reacting the way that they would normally react."

"I haven't seen anything

out of the ordinary around here. People are staying safe, staying in their cars, and going about their business. I've seen places like New York that this stuff is spreading like crazy. Thankfully, that isn't the case here."

"People just need to keep

staying smart about it, and we will limit the amount of it here. Not being safe is the most selfish thing you could do right now, because others are at risk."

Absentee Ballots...from Page 1A

absentee ballot for the May 19 primary.

Instructions for filling out the form and mailing it are included with the application, and people can also email it: "In lieu of mailing, you can scan or take a picture of your completed and signed application and email it to: tcelections@townscountyga.com."

This measure is meant

to limit people gathering for voting and thereby spreading the novel coronavirus, which has already caused the March 24 Presidential Preference Primary to be canceled.

Voters who did not get a chance to vote in the Presidential Preference Primary will be able to vote for their presidential candidate of choice during the upcoming May 19 primary.

To reiterate, as voting

often translates to people gathering in groups, elections can make it easy for the deadly COVID-19 virus to spread to voters and poll workers alike, so the state is preemptively mailing absentee ballots in anticipation of a surge in their use for the upcoming election.

There has been some discussion of moving the May 19 election to the summer to give the state more time to flatten the curve of infection from the virus, though Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger has said that state law would have to be changed to accomplish this.

"I execute elections, I don't create them," Raffensperger said. "If the leadership of the General Assembly and the governor wants to hold the election on May 19, we will support them and do our best to make it happen efficiently, safely and accurately."

"If the General Assembly and the governor wants to move the election to June or July, we will support them in that too."

Food Pantry closed until further notice

Due to the statewide stay at home order, the Towns County Food Pantry will be closed until further notice.

However, we will attempt to deliver food boxes "ONLY" on an emergency basis as volunteers are extremely

limited (1). If you need emergency food call the food pantry at (706) 896 - 4783 leave your contact information and someone will contact you within 24 hours.

Stay safe,
Food Pantry Coordinator

VFW cancels April Fish Frys

We wish to thank all of Towns County for supporting our VFW Fish Fry. Due to recent conditions we will be cancelling Fish Fries for at

least April. We hope to begin them in May and hope to see you all there.

Hiawassee VFW Post 7807

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to that digital platform."

To include as many people as possible, the churches are working through different mediums to ensure folks get the guidance they want and need.

"We have a lot of people in our community that are 65 plus and not very digitally savvy," Taylor said. "We continue to try to reach out to them with some more traditional methods and making our services available to them."

"We have meetings right now by Zoom that our community can get involved with. They are doing video lessons with over 50 people, and we are meeting anytime we need to bring something urgently before our decisionmakers."

"As far as our youth goes, they are adapting to this really well, and all of our small group leaders are hosting their own Zoom meetings. We want to keep the community together and stay in touch with them."

Churches are asking that the community listen to health care professionals and keep their faith strong while

going through this period of isolation.

"We shut our church down after the second Sunday in March," said Pastor Stephen Soulen of Sharp Memorial United Methodist Church. "Most Methodist churches were asked to close at that time and stop having services."

"We have been trying to understand how to do services online for people and do services for the children online. We had our committees contacting people every week. Our hope is in Jesus Christ, and we need to listen to the wisdom of our medical professionals."

"They know that this is a very serious virus, and we should listen to that. We need to diligently be practicing what they are recommending we do, staying at home and wearing masks. Going out in groups puts too many other people in danger, and do no harm is part of our social rules, so we want people to do no harm and stay at home until this passes over."

An unintended consequence of the outbreak

sees churches finding new opportunities to reach larger audiences with digital platforms, all while being safe and protecting churchgoers.

"Viruses come and they go, and when we are talking about the community of faith and the church, we only have to look back at our history to see what we have come through," Taylor said. "We have come through war, we have come through persecutions. I am totally confident that we will come through this virus."

"Fear is our biggest enemy right now, fear and ignorance. It is important to protect your congregation and community from getting that virus, that is why we made a decision early to cease our services."

Added Taylor, "We are having to learn that church is not the building ... the church is the body, the people, and we are still having church, just not the building. I think a lot of our churches are having to learn very quickly how to stay relevant. The message of the Gospel never changes, but how we communicate it has to constantly be evolving."