Thurston County COVID-19 Cases Grow

Government, Health Leaders Request Social Distancing in Effort to Slowdown Spread

BY ERIC ROSANE

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ston County Public Health and on the local, state and federal lev-Social Services reported five conels — attempt to slow the spread

firmed cases of novel coronavirus of the virus by pushing social dis-statewide on Friday, March 13, from March 16 through April 24 in the county and no deaths.

As of Tuesday morning, Thur- worsen as government officials —

The situation is expected to those with underlying health conditions to stay home.

Gov. Jay Inslee called for the

tancing measures and calling for leaving school districts to scramble for contingency plans over the of COVID-19. weekend and early this week.

About 1.14 million Washmandatory closure of all schools ington students will miss school

in an attempt to slow the spread

On Monday, Inslee restricted

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Local **Schools** Work to **Provide** Meals, Childcare **After**

BY ERIC ROSANE

Closing

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All Washington schools were ordered closed for six weeks by Gov. Jav Inslee starting on Tuesday, March 17, due to the worsening situation regionally with the spread of COVID-19.

Schools are building and enacting contingency plans to help families with food, day care and otner resources.

On Monday afternoon, Yelm Community Schools announced it would provide meal services and childcare five days a week with South Sound YMCA. More information can be found at www.ycs.wednet.edu.

All children ages 18 and under can access a free breakfast-lunch combo meal starting March 18.

These bags can be picked up from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at Fort Stevens Elementary, McKenna Elementary, Ridgeline Middle School, Yelm High School (at the

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'I'm Not Going to Let It Panic Me'

Yelm Seniors Resilient, **Cautious as Virus Spreads**



Yelm Senior Center Executive Director Jeanie James, 70, right, shares a laugh on Thursday, March 12, with Theresa Wostsa, 79, a regular center visitor. Wostsa and the other 30 to 40 seniors who use the center daily will have to find other avenues for social interaction when the center closes for three weeks from Friday, March 13 until Tuesday, April 7. The closure is intended to help alleviate the possible spread of COVID-19, an illness caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, that appears to most severely affect the elderly and those with compromised immune systems.

BY PAUL DUNN

Nisqually Valley News

Craig McCauley minces words ever so slightly, his euphemism only minimally ambiguous given the subject matter with which he's grappling.

"Just let me go," he says. Just let me "die" is what he

The 72-year-old Rainier resident isn't sick, but like the rest of us is functioning day by day beneath the lengthening shadow that is COVID-19, an illness caused by the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2.

McCauley's not yet worried about the virus, he'll tell you, noting he frequently washes his hands, keeps as much social distance as he can, and follows any other advice health experts have recommended. But should those precautions fail, he's ready to take what comes.

"If I get in bad shape like I've seen some people in the news, just go ahead and let me go," he said



Rainier resident Craig McCauley sets up tables last week for a St. Patrick's Day meal at the Yelm Senior Center. McCauley, 72, has volunteered at the center for four years, primarily helping with kitchen/food-related duties.

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week between volunteer shifts at the Yelm Senior Center. "It doesn't make any sense if I'm to the point where I can't talk and I'm all twisted up to keep me alive. I don't want to be a burden on my family."

 $McCauley \ - \ clad \ in \ jeans$ and a Harley Davidson T-shirt this day, his long, reddish-blond beard asway - sets tables at the center, carefully placing napkins, silverware and glasses in their appropriate places for a special St. Patrick's Day meal for the center's guests.

He has volunteered at the center for about four years, his highpitched, hushed voice audible to other volunteers only if they stand close. Hard of hearing and unable to read anymore since a ghastly motorcycle accident in 2012 nearly killed him, McCauley exudes a certain fatalistic nonchalance a will to shrug and let nature take its course — that other seniors at the center also exhibit.

Prepare, they say, but don't

For some, that means relying on a higher power.

Theresa Wostsa, 79, is quick to smile and laugh, though these days her anxiety is likely to periodically torment her. Wostsa moved to Yelm from Virginia four years ago to live with her daughter and two grandsons.

A devout Catholic, Wostsa prays about 45 minutes a night, she said.

"I pray every night that we don't get the virus, and I just pray that God is listening. I let my religion help me and think about all the sickness and suffering and the poor and needy. I try to think of other people besides myself," she said.

Like her counterparts in the senior center, Wostsa has been following the recommendations of health experts - washing her hands three to four times a day and sleeping on clean bedding and recliner covers thanks to her diligent daughter.

And what if she contracts the

have to quarantine for 14 days in a way," she said. "But I'd try to find something to pass the time."

For the past four years, senior center volunteer Danny Gaytan has been passing his time mak-



Yelm resident Alice Bickle spends time last week perusing intriguing books on cooking and health at the Yelm Senior Center. Bickle, 91, spent much of her life raising her three daughters and also operated a daycare center.

and cleaning pots and pans for the center's members. The 63-yearold has lived in Yelm for 18 years, retiring some years ago from his second career as an environmental technician. Before that he drove big-rig trucks, criss-crossing the country delivering janitorial supplies.

Seemingly stoic by nature, Gaytan hasn't yet let COVID-19 spook him, though his diabetes disease makes him more vulnerable to coronavirus complications.

"I haven't really worried about it," he said, "because I don't want to be a worry wart. I'm taking all the precautions I need to, and if I get it we'll just have to go day by day. I'm trying to stay positive."

The same holds true for Gaytan's wife of 24 years, Sharon Stepp, though her situation's a bit more fragile, he said.

"It's getting my wife pretty worried, because she'll be 65 this year and has multiple sclerosis," he said. "And we're both trying to stay away from crowds because of our age group."

What they're not doing is buying carloads of paper products as some people apparently have.

"Why are people buying so "It would get pretty boring to much toilet paper and water?" Gaytan asks incredulously. "We need to be buying Gatorade and flu medicine, not toilet paper and water. We need liquids that will help our immune systems."

But if those measures don't ing meals, fashioning desserts work and Gaytan is forced to ter's executive director.



Yelm resident Danny Gaytan prepares roasted potatoes for a recent St. Patrick's Day meal at the Yelm Senior Center. Gaytan, 63, has volunteered at the center for four years, primarily helping fix meals and cleaning up in the center's kitchen.

quarantine for two weeks, he Stepp live about 5 miles out of town with their chickens, goats and three cats.

"I'd stay occupied with our animals and chores around the property," he said, noting that he's always kept at least two week's worth of supplies to ride out emergencies.

"I was taught from an early age to always be prepared for the unexpected," he explained.

That adage in a nutshell also explains Jeanie James' philosophy. James, 70, is the senior cen-

"We, as seniors, are at an age figures he'll stay busy enough to where we are prepared for anyavoid going stir crazy. He and thing," she said. "We plan for emergencies, and perhaps that's a reason there's no hysteria here at the senior center."

> James, who has lived in Yelm since 1975, quickly learned the anti-coronavirus drill health experts have been emphasizing.

"I wash my hands a ridiculous amount of times, and I drilled it into my children and grandchildren, too," she said. "People should be doing this all the time."

And though she wouldn't call it hoarding, James keeps her home's shelves stocked.

"I just don't run out of stuff, because seniors plan ahead for pick up or delivery at noon.

what they'll need," she said.

Like toilet paper.

"Somebody told me I could go on the corner and sell a toilet roll for \$100," she said, laughing.

James, who said she has had the flu twice in the past five years, isn't fretting about COVID-19, but she has advice for people who might be.

"If you have a fear of getting the virus, you should do what makes you feel most comfortable," she said. "If you have a compromised immune system you might consider staying home. Make educated decisions, because there shouldn't be hysteria." Alice Bickle seems to have

made educated decisions all her life, because at age 91 the senior center member is a picture of health and intellect. ""I have had an exceptionally

healthy life with a strong immune system," she said. "So I'm not worrying about the virus, and I'm not going to let it panic me."

Like James, Bickle credits her ability to persevere to the long life she's lived.

"From day one, you make due with your circumstances, and whatever happens, you can handle it," she said. "The fact is you're going to go at some point, and it's not your decision, so there's no point worrying about it."

And that's the philosophy Bickle's taking with COVID-19.

"If I get sick, I'm going to just stay home and not force my children (three daughters in nearby towns) to take care of me," she said. "Whatever happens, happens."

Craig McCauley couldn't have said it any better. After all, he suffered a motorcycle accident that kept him in a hospital for two months - and lived to tell about

"I was close to dead," he said, "but I survived."

Whatever happens, happens.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Yelm and Rainier senior centers will be closed until COVID-19 is no longer a communicable threat. THE YELM CENTEr will be closed until at least April 7; the Rainier center will be closed until further notice for eatin meals. The center will be open for take out meals and home delivery for people who are homebound. Volunteers will deliver meals to people's homes; lunch will be ready for

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and at the front and back gates at Clearwood.

Monday through Friday and will not be available during spring break week, April 6 through April

receive their meal. No identification is required, and the child the school district.

The district also has child care Tornado Alley parent dropoff), available through the YMCA's Y-Care program.

Services will be provided Mon-These meals will be available day through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Registration is required and can be found at this link: https://southsoundymca.org/y-care/.

For families of the Yelm Boys The child must be present to and Girls Club, an all-day camp will be available for a fee of \$70 per week for every child with

does not need to attend class in scholarships available to those who qualify. Registration for that begins on Wednesday.

> Running Start students are expected to continue with classes as planned. Spring quarter will begin a week late, on April 13. They'll in most cases work remotely.

> Rainier School District will also offer free meals during school closures, starting Wednespicked up from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Rainier Elementary School.

families to stay in contact with their students' teachers for educational opportunities during closures, and are recommending students read at least 20 minutes a day.

The last day of school for the district has also tentatively been moved to June 19 for all students,

except high school seniors. On Sunday, Tenino School day, March 18. Those can be District Superintendent Joe Belmonte said the district was still working behind the scenes to im-

The district is also encouraging plement its contingency plan.

"We are currently in the process of developing district plans to support students with non-educational services as requested by the Governor and OSPI. Further communication regarding these services will be forthcoming. The Tenino School District will provide regular updates to the staff, students, parents and community via Skyward email, District and school websites and social me-

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the number of public gatherings to 50 people and also called for the closure of all restaurants and bars — and many other businesses — for two weeks.

Multiple cities, counties and other jurisdictions have enacted state of emergency measures. These declarations ultimately concentrate legislative and operational authority to executives, but may mean varying things depending on the organization.

During an emergency meeting on Thursday, March 12, the Thurston County Board of Commissioners and Board of Health passed a resolution declaring the outbreak of COVID-19 a local emergency.

The board also suspended the work of all of its advisory boards, commissions, committees and councils for at least four weeks on Monday.

"We are taking these meaand safety of our most vulnerable populations in Thurston County and lead by example," said Commission Chair John Hutchings.

"We will continue to assess and take additional measures to minimize the risk of spreading CO-VID-19 throughout our community."

The City of Tenino enacted a state of emergency declaration. This measure will last indefinitely until further notice.

"I want to get ahead of any potential issues," Mayor Wayne Fournier said in a statement. "Our normal contracting process is designed for long lead times. We can't be reactive here; suspending the normal acquisition procedure allows us to be proactive. We want to prevent the worst from happening, not simply clean up

This proclamation allows the city to take authority on emergency spending procedures to ensure the welfare of the city, its residence and customers. It also power, such as directing people away from areas if necessary.

Tenino will suspend all colsures to help protect the health lection actions, late fees and the accruing interest on overdue accounts during this state of emer-

gency.

Yelm councilmember Joe De-

Pinto wrote in a Facebook post on Monday that Yelm will not be proclaiming a state of emergency, but instead will cancel all nonessential city activities.

That includes in-person utility and bill payments, municipal court, passport services, pet licensing and other customer service-related business, DePinto

"The city will continue to provide essential services such as water, sewer, police and emergency management, building permit and inspection services," the councilmember wrote. "City parks and bathrooms will also remain open. The city will not shut off utilities for non-payment for anyone who cannot pay due to the impacts of the coronavirus. Customer account balances will continue to accrue though."

Here are the numbers, as of gives the city's police chief more Tuesday morning, related to the spread of COVID-19:

> • In Washington state, there had been a total of 904 total confirmed cases and 11,582 negative cases. The number of coronavirus-related deaths stood at 48, according to the state Department of Health.

• In the United States, there had been a total of 3,487 confirmed cases reported and 68 total deaths, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention reported. Most cases are still under investigation, but many are expected to be community contracted.

Pierce County has seen a surge in cases over the last week. On Monday, the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department announced nine additional cases, bringing its count up to 38 total

Resources for individuals and businesses affected by the regional COVID-19 outbreak can found on the governor's office website.

The Community Foundation of South Puget Sound and Unit- a media release stated.

ed Way of Thurston County also announced Sunday the establishment of the Thurston County CO-VID-19 Response Fund.

dia," he wrote.

This fund will benefit public health workers in their response to the coronavirus outbreak. It will also benefit disproportionately impacted families and individuals, as well as the organizations that serve them.

"Together, UWTC and the Community Foundation will gather data to identify emerging needs, as well as gaps in existing services, and work to rapidly mobilize and deploy resources to the people who are most vulnerable to the economic impacts of COVID-19 in Thurston County,"

