

## EDITORIAL

# Why distancing actually matters

It's April now, and some of you still aren't following social distancing guidelines.

You may think you are young and healthy enough to not be hospitalized or in need of a ventilator if you catch the COVID-19 coronavirus, but choosing to ignore the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines does not just affect you.

Every time you go to a friend's house, make unnecessary trips to the grocery store, walk too close to others in a park or neighborhood, or decide not to wear a homemade mask or gloves when in public, you are drastically increasing the chances of catching or passing along this virus.

You are making that decision for your elderly neighbor who has no one able to look after them if they get seriously sick. You are making that decision for the grocery store employee trying desperately to keep shelves stocked amid ongoing hoarding behavior and supply shortages. You are making that decision for the person behind you in line who grabs the gasoline nozzle not knowing you did not wash your hands.

In Virginia, the latest statistics show that 16% of all those who have tested positive have needed to be hospitalized. If that number continues to grow unchecked, our local hospitals will be inundated and may soon face the equipment and staffing shortages seen in other parts of the country.

More than 65% of those who test positive and have to be hospitalized are under the age of 60, with the highest percentage of hospitalizations occurring in the 40- to 60-year-old age group. This statistic remains true for the cases in which the patient has died. It is not accurate to assume this disease "only affects the elderly" any more.

Staying at home is not just a rule made up by the government to disrupt our daily lives. The directives—like most laws and regulations—are for the common good. If we each do our part, we all will benefit in the long run.

To put it simply, the longer you refuse to acknowledge that this IS necessary and it DOES apply to you, the longer ALL of us will have to continue doing it until this virus starts to slow down.

So please, stay home. Be mindful of the effect your actions—or inactions—have on others. And keep washing those hands.

## EDITORIAL

THURSDAY, JUNE 11, 2020

# Of pandemics, protests, and the necessity of compassion

June charged in to 2020 louder than the rattling of the ancient window air conditioning unit struggling to combat the sudden onset of summer heat in the *Greene County Record* office.

Confirmed cases of the COVID-19 virus continue to rise as free drive-thru testing sites become a weekly occurrence and businesses continue to reopen.

Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam announced last week that most of the Commonwealth would progress to Phase Two of reopening (with the exception of Northern Virginia and Richmond), outlining guidance for businesses that have been closed since early March on how to safely ease back into operation.

Citizens continue to struggle with questions of safety when it comes to mask wearing, social distancing and proper precautions when visiting businesses, with some feeling like the pandemic will never end and others acting like it's already over.

In addition to a global pandemic, the horrific killing of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis Police on May 25 has prompted protests around the country and world in a call for social justice. Images of peaceful protestors holding signs and marching in the streets to make their voices heard as part of the Black Lives Matter movement are offset by those of rioting, looting and violence across media platforms.

Life in 2020 is tense, and nearly everyone's mental health is being tested. Compassion is the key, to friends and neighbors as well as to ourselves.

It is okay to care about the issues but also worry that the large-scale gatherings could lead to a spike in viral outbreaks in coming weeks. Have compassion.

It is okay to want to be a part of the solution but not know how to be a perfect ally. Keep having difficult conversations, examining possible sources of bias and listening to the stories of those whose backgrounds and experiences differ from yours, and have compassion.

It is okay to want to keep friends and loved ones safe by staying home, following protocols and limiting social gatherings, but also to worry about the long-term effects of isolation, unemployment and other mental health stressors. Try to reach out in distance-appropriate ways to check in with those who have been isolated in your life, and have compassion.

It is okay to be concerned about the struggling economy, loss of local businesses and rising unemployment and to worry about the future of the country while not having the spare finances to directly support every local business in your community. Find ways to support local merchants when you can, whether through financial means or sharing a social media post to let others know about a new delivery option or online sale.

We're not yet quite halfway through 2020, and no one knows how many more curveballs this year may have yet in store for us, so our advice at present is to remember that nearly every one of us is struggling amid so many issues we cannot control. One we can is how we respond to others. Let us do so with an abundance of compassion.

Stay safe.

## EDITORIAL

# Shine out your light

**H**anukkah starts tonight. The Jewish festival of lights lasts eight days and commemorates the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 165 B.C. by the Maccabees.



Legend says that after the destruction of the temple, there was only enough oil left to light the candles in the Temple for one night. By some miracle, the oil lasted eight nights; and that is why the holiday is celebrated by lighting candles for eight nights (and by eating lots of foods fried in oil!).

It is common practice to place the lighted menorah on a window sill, so that its light can shine out into the darkness at the time of year when the days are the shortest. This way, both those inside and outside can see the light and know that it is cause for celebration.

This holiday season, perhaps we can all take a lesson from this tradition of finding light in the darkness.

Are you unhappy about not being able to have the usual large holiday gatherings this year due to the pandemic? Share what you do have with those less fortunate by making a donation or volunteering at a local food pantry.

Do you love to bake for those holiday office parties that won't be happening this year? Make the cookies anyway, and drop them off (safely) on a front porch for a loved one or neighbor who might be in need of a smile.

Do you get joy from decorating your house for the holidays, but miss being able to share that with visiting guests from out of town? Decorate the windows or front lawn so you can share a smile with neighbors driving by. Call faraway friends over FaceTime or Zoom and do a virtual walk-through, sharing stories of your favorite decorative pieces or holiday recipes.

Love holiday shopping? Make a gift for a family member or neighbor to drop off or take advantage of online deals to send a small piece of cheer to someone you miss seeing this year. Cheer someone else up, rather than reflecting on missed traditions.

Love your warm seasonal drink from the local coffee shop? The next time you're in the drive-thru, pick up a gift card for a friend; they make great stocking stuffers, and you'll be supporting a struggling local business while also bringing some of that cheer to others.

This year has been dark and grim, but only by finding what light still remains can we see it through to the light at the end of the tunnel. Find what it is that brings you joy, and hold on to it tight. Share it in whatever ways you safely can.

Find your light, and shine it out into the darkness of 2020.

Hanukkah 2020 starts at sundown on Thursday, Dec. 10 and ends Friday, Dec. 18. For more info about virtual Chanukkah celebrations, see the article on B1.