

COVID-19

impact

approaches

Rappahannock

‘like a wave’

BY JOHN McCASLIN
Rappahannock News staff

Confronting a variety of emotions, unprecedented challenges and frightening unknowns, Rappahannock residents suddenly find themselves struggling for normalcy in the face of a killer coronavirus that has no signs of letting up.

The difficult truth — shared from a distance of six feet — is that normalcy in this rural county isn't anywhere to be found.

Schools and courts have closed, shops and restaurants have shuttered, theaters are darkened and public events postponed until much safer times. Families from Huntly to Nethers, the highly-susceptible elderly in particular, have sheltered in place.

Late Tuesday afternoon, County Administrator, Garrey W. Curry, Jr. declared a Local State of Emergency in response to the potential spread of the coronavirus and its impact on Rappahannock, providing the opportunity for

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future funding reimbursement from the state and federal government — and providing for emergency procurement if necessary.

The overall impact on local jobs and the economy isn't yet known, but it won't be good. And yet nobody in Rappahannock County has tested positive for the highly contagious novel coronavirus, called COVID-19.

But as Curry warned this newspaper, its impact “approaches us like a wave.”

“We're here for emergency response, and this clearly is an emergency response of unprecedented dimensions,” Rappahannock Benevolent Fund Chair Rev. Miller Hunter tells the Rappahannock News. “We can help in any way that's helpful for that person. Typically we help with mortgage or rent assistance, utility bills, car repairs — any emergency that is valid and can be helpful for them and their family.”

The Northern Piedmont Community Foundation has similarly launched the NPCF Emergency Response Fund, to assist local organizations most heavily relied upon during such a catastrophe.

“We plan to address those groups who support critical human needs both day-to-day and long term,” says executive director Jane Bowling-Wilson. “Our nonprofit organizations will continue to need donor support. As your Community Foundation, we will remain attentive to the needs of

Benevolent Fund chair: “We're here for emergency response, and this clearly is an emergency response of unprecedented dimensions.”

our donors, the nonprofit organizations and our community.”

The widely leaned upon Path Foundation has made an initial funding grant to NPCF of \$100,000 to help relieve the human suffering the pandemic has and will continue to cause. The foundation has also contributed additional funds in recent days to the Rappahannock Food Pantry.

“Unprecedented times call for unprecedented actions,” observes PATH Foundation President and CEO Christy Connolly, “which we're seeing through previously unimagined cancellations, warnings and recommendations.”

Rappahannock Food Pantry Board President Noel Laing assured county residents that the vital food distribution center in Sperryville will remain open through the crisis — Tuesdays and Thursdays from noon to 4 p.m., and Saturdays from noon to 2 p.m. — albeit “for drive-thru food distribution.”

Recipients can drive up and be

handed food by volunteers without having to leave their cars. Pre-packed boxes of food staples are available, along with milk, meat, bread and produce. All-important backpacks for school children will also be distributed.

“You do not have to be a client of the Food Pantry to receive food,” Lang stresses during this time of need.

In the meantime, Businesses of Rappahannock President Theresa Wood reminds residents “this is going to be a very challenging time for local business...”

“If we want life in Rapp to return to ‘normal’ after this crisis we must think of ways to shore up our local businesses so that they can weather this storm.”

Towards that end when he awakened Sunday morning, former Washington Mayor John Fox Sullivan took it upon himself to rally the community against the dreaded disease.

“Though we do not know how prolonged the corona crisis will last, we know it will have, and likely already is having a devastating impact on our community, and yes, throughout the entire world, but I focus on our community, a place we can have some direct impact — health, jobs, income, social [services], etc...”

“There are many questions, so many out of the box solutions to helping people in need. What are the solutions, I only have an idea or two. As a group we really could be imaginative. This is a time for our community to come together.”

One man's call to combat coronavirus

'Prepare for the worst and hope for the best. That's what our parents and grandparents did'

BY JOHN MCCASLIN
Rappahannock News staff

The setting and atmosphere bordered on surreal: a leading member of the Rappahannock community banding neighbors together in his farm field to fight the coronavirus.

"This is just a preliminary meeting because whatever this thing is — and I don't think anybody knows what it is — we can talk and figure out what kind of resources we've got in our community, or in our neighborhood, that we can maybe help fulfill other people's needs," explained Bill Fletcher, who given his current health spoke through a face mask.

"That's the way it's supposed to work," Fletcher told those who heeded his call to action.

"When the 1918 Spanish flu was around it came, it went, it came back, and society broke down," noted the Sperryville resident, whose family settled in the county centuries ago. "That's why not many people talk about the Spanish Flu because they were ashamed of how they acted..."

"And we don't know whether this thing is going to be gone in two weeks, or be here for a year. And if we don't join together and help each other then we get what we deserve. If we act like the Democrats and Republicans do in Washington, D.C., then we're all going to be dead. And you can't count on Rappahannock — the government — to do it.

"I'm not saying it is medieval, but it could get



BY JOHN MCCASLIN

Bill Fletcher, wearing a face mask for personal health protection, addresses neighbors Monday evening at his family's Stuart Field in Sperryville about possible community impacts of COVID-19.

medieval," he added. "And if we work together we can lessen the impact on all of us. I think what should be done is everybody get together with their neighbors within a mile or two and try to band a little citizens' group and decide how they're going to handle the issue themselves..."

"We can pool our resources and work together and we'll fix it. I think that's what the whole county and nation should do."

Among those who showed up at Fletcher's property early Monday evening were Rappahannock County Attorney Art Goff, Board of Zoning Appeals member David Konick, and Scrabble residents Nina and Colby May.

"I think it makes perfect sense," commented Colby. "I love it when communities come together and self-help and take care of each other. I think

Bill's got a good idea here and I think it's important for all of us to make sure we are conscious of who our neighbors are, and what they're doing, and if they're OK."

Those in attendance provided their names, addresses and contact information to share. Also distributed were emergency forms to fill out and keep at home containing personal and health information for first responders.

"I'm not freaking out, but prepare for the worst and hope for the best," Fletcher concluded. "That's what our parents and grandparents did. And if we don't? The structure of society today is if the country closes down for two weeks are you going to have internet? Are you going to have phones? Are you going to have electricity? Are you going to have fuel?"

SENIORS

Rappahannock responds to the needs of seniors

BY SARA SCHONHARDT

Special to the Rappahannock News

The COVID-19 outbreak is generating a rapid response from local organizations and community members working to meet the needs of Rappahannock County's senior citizens

Elderly residents are among the most susceptible to the virus, which is particularly important here where the median age is 50 and roughly a quarter of the population is 65 or older. Here's the latest on actions the county is taking:

On Monday the Senior Center in Scrabble operated by Rappahannock Rapidan Community Services announced it was closing its doors for the foreseeable future in an effort to protect the health of its senior members. It's now working to put together a meal delivery service for those who regularly visit and receive lunch at the center, an

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expansion of a long-running home food delivery program that provides 10 frozen meals every two weeks to seniors who are housebound.

The deliveries will contain enough food for about five meals and are a combination of frozen meals and shelf stables, including cereal, oatmeal, fruit cups and bread, said Darcy Canton, the senior center supervisor.

Meal delivery will begin in Rappahannock Thursday and continue until the center reopens, she said.

More than 40 seniors belong to the center, and Canton said 26 have signed up for the meals. For now, they'll only be able to service seniors who are members, though that could change depending on how long the situation continues.

Mimi Forbes, who manages the Food Pantry, said they're also working with the senior center to ensure that seniors who get food from the pantry will receive deliveries. She says they're also open to providing food boxes to anybody who lives in the county who may not currently get assistance.

Boxes from the pantry contain canned and boxed foods, some meat, eggs and butter and boxed milk. To prevent contact they're asking the deliveries be placed on recipients porches, and Forbes says they're trying to keep a safe distance with people when loading the cars.

"We would love to have any volunteers interested in helping, not just

to drive but to come and help put boxes together and to help pass them out," Forbes said. "It takes about five people to really fill up a car – somebody's doing this box or somebody's doing the fresh fruits and vegetables, we even have toilet paper to give out."

For now, RRCS will handle most of the food deliveries, partly out of an effort to keep drivers on payroll who work across their service areas. But Canton is keeping a list of those who have offered to deliver meals or shop or pick up prescriptions and says they'll put them to work as needs arise.

Many organizations have found themselves in uncharted territory in responding to the outbreak so many of their actions remain a work in progress. Canton says the Food Pantry, Rapp at Home and the Rappahannock County Department of Social Services (DSS) are trying to coordinate to make sure not only that they assist those they typically look after, but to ensure no one in need goes unserved.

Jennifer Parker, director of the DSS, says they're reaching out by phone to the seniors they work with to ensure they have adequate medication, food and supplies and are making a list of needs.

"We want to ensure everyone is safe and where everyone is currently located should we need to access them," she wrote in an email.

They're also planning to reach out to the Sheriff's office to see what and who is on the senior check-in list and if they can handle additional capacity should that be needed.

COMBATING ISOLATION

Experts warn that loneliness is a big risk factor for depression among seniors and Canton says any way residents can stay in touch with one another is important.

One thing she suggests is that people buy stamps and drop them off at the Food Pantry or other distribution places providing assistance to seniors so they can write notes to each other, family and friends.

"They're going to need that because it's lonely right now. It's going to be lonely and isolating for however long this goes on," she said. "Just the fact that somebody is thinking of you means a lot."

Those who attend the senior center all have each other's phone numbers and addresses and she's also encouraging them to make phone calls. "Even though they're not able to hug and squeeze and be physically there, they can still be a part of each other's lives," Canton said.

"We're trying to keep them isolated but also connected, and that's a really hard thing to do," she noted.

Parker said Joe Kimpflen, a family services specialist at Rappahannock DSS, is checking in with seniors to see what they have access to in their homes to engage in activities and who is available to check in on them. Kimpflen reports that some still have family checking in regularly.

In addition, she noted, DSS will not be closing Medicaid cases for lack of renewal forms or verifications for the next 60 days due to the health crisis.

"We want to ensure everyone maintains their health coverage. We will

continue to have staff in the building to assist anyone who may need assistance with benefits for SNAP, Medicaid, TANF Child or Adult Protective Services," Parker said.

Rapp at Home Executive Director Mary Katherine Ishee says their office remains open and is working to continue individual, volunteer services, such as grocery and pharmacy pickups. They've cancelled events for the remainder of March but are thinking of creative ways they can meet social distancing requirements, such as holding online activities, doing things outside or delivering books or other entertainment that will keep seniors engaged. That's important to prevent further problems such as cognitive decline, said Ishee.

HOW TO HELP

→ RRCS is asking volunteers or those interested in helping to contact executive director, Jim McGraffe, who is handling the coordination of assistance at 540-825-3100 extension 3145.

→ Rapp at Home is accepting volunteers, though some of its services require that they have training and background checks. Ishee said if people know someone they think is isolated they can call Rapp at Home at 540-937-4663.

→ Anyone concerned about their family members or neighbors in the county should reach out to DSS at 540-675-3313. "We will ensure we make contact with the individual whether that be in person or by phone to address concerns and needs," Parker said.

COMMUNITY SERVICES

County agencies, nonprofits convene on preparedness

BY SARA SCHONHARDT
For Foothills Forum

Community leaders from several county non-profits, fire and rescue, the public school system and county departments from administrator to social services, held an unprecedented phone discussion Sunday to determine how best to meet the needs of Rappahannock's most vulnerable residents as the coronavirus continues to spread.

There are not yet any confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Rappahannock, but surrounding counties including Culpeper and Madison have identified infections and the weekend brought in a wave of outside tourists, raising the potential for transmission.

The meeting's organizers said they aim to establish a network of nonprofits and businesses that can be activated during the national emergency starting



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with those that have traditionally dealt with and will be dealing with members of the community most susceptible to shocks.

On the call, participants discussed the services they're currently providing

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in response to the pandemic and what support and assistance they need or anticipating needing. They also talked about how they were managing volunteers and staff and coordinating with other county leaders.

Ensuring the availability of food and meeting health care needs were among their main concerns and priorities, as well as making sure they're set up to respond to needs that will evolve in the weeks and months ahead.

Many said their operations were running well for now, but they expressed great concern about the future.

"What's happening right now is probably not going to be what the real issues are a month or two months from now if the reality of not being back at work begins to kick in for folks," said Lisa Paine-Welles, executive director of the Child Care & Learning Center (CCLC), echoing a concern shared by others on the call.

CCLC has had some requests for help in applying for both unemployment assistance and tax returns and picking up medications, said Paine-Welles, but she and others anticipate more requests for financial help to cover utilities and other household expenses in the future. Paine-Welles said they expect additional child care assistance will be needed and she worries that because they were already at capacity before closing to the virus, they're going to have more requests for placements than they have available.

Peter Stenner, the treasurer at the Food Pantry, said their main concern was being able to maintain their food supply as demand increases from other food pantries in the area and suppliers such as Aldi and Martins start to ration donations.

Last week 115 families picked up food at the pantry. More than 20 were either new or infrequent visitors, and Stenner expects they'll see an increase in demand in the weeks ahead.

"We're doing OK, we're providing a lot of food. We see a long-term need for providing food," he said. "Our only concern is really being able to sustain the supply of food coming into the food pantry. Bread and toilet paper are two of our long poles in the tent right now."

Other community leaders said they too expect to see more requests for assistance.

"We expect an enormous increase in the number of applications for the people in that gap between being laid off and receiving their first check. But we have been unable to make any kind of estimates as to what those numbers will be," said Kees Dutilh from the Benevolent Fund, which provides financial assistance and supportive services to residents in times of crisis.

He requested that the group pull together a comprehensive list of services different organizations and county agencies are providing that he can give to clients and those in need of referrals.

Working together

The group also talked about prioritizing coordination so they're not duplicating efforts and leaning on one other to share resources when possible.

Many organizations in the county



Strict banking measures

Atlantic Union Bank in Washington is taking no chances amid the COVID-19 outbreak.

"I was at the bank today," this newspaper's Luke Christopher wrote Tuesday. "To process a check the tellers had on gloves and sprayed down my debit card with Lysol, then the pen they sent in the tube. Then the bank manager, Toby [Bayard 'Toby' Waterbury], said it was not okay to use them."

Difficult times to say the least, but new findings show that the dreaded coronavirus lives for several hours and even days depending on the type of surface.

Seen here, Rappahannock County's Lillian Freeman Aylor completes a careful transaction via Atlantic Union Bank's drive-thru lanes on Tuesday.

BY LUKE CHRISTOPHER

provide similar services, such as food provision and delivery, financial assistance, care for seniors and are already reaching out to one another to coordinate how they can work more efficiently.

Representatives from the Benevolent Fund, the Department of Social Services (DSS), the Rappahannock Rapidan Community Service (RRCS) Board and CCLC agreed to coordinate in providing help for people applying for social service assistance programs, such as unemployment benefits. Rapp at Home, which provides outreach to seniors, is coordinating with the Senior Center, Benevolent Fund, the Food Pantry, DSS and RRCS to discuss how they can streamline their work.

Like Dutilh, Jennifer Parker at Rappahannock County DSS said with more businesses closing they expect a "huge increase" in applications for SNAP (formerly known as food stamps), Medicaid and child care subsidies.

She suggested that people who are not computer savvy or not comfortable applying for benefits over the phone do so through Common Help (commonhelp.virginia.gov) or call 855-635-4370. Applications then go to DSS for processing.

Parker said the directors of the social services offices in the surrounding counties of Madison, Orange and Culpeper also got together last week and agreed to assist one another with emergencies as long as the resources are available.

Looking ahead

One of Parker's biggest concerns, however, is what the situation will look like once the virus is under control and things have begun to return to normal.

"I understand that postponing electric bills and house payments and rent is good for now, but I'm worried about our low-income people and the people that live paycheck to paycheck and what that's going to look like for them in June, July, August when this settles down and they have these huge back bills and due rent and where they're go-

ing to be when they're not able to pay up," she said.

That means not just thinking about how to handle the immediate crisis, but how the county will assist residents one it passes.

Betsy Dietel, who was representing the PATH Foundation and Rappahannock Communities, also spoke about the need to think in the long term, saying "even after this is all over there is going to be a huge backlog that needs to be taken care of."

The PATH Foundation recently made a \$100,000 grant to the Northern Piedmont Community Foundation and is making several more large grants that can be allocated to organizations in Rappahannock, Culpeper and Fauquier counties, said Dietel, noting that an effort is underway to get major donors coordinating in both the short- and long-term.

Several people also expressed concerns about medical services — for both physical and mental health — and their capacity to deal with the crisis.

Eve Brooks who sits on the board of Rappahannock Rapidan Community Services, which runs the senior center (now temporarily closed) and provides mental health and substance abuse services, said they've been working to put together a plan to continue to provide services to the most vulnerable since all congregate care has closed.

One of their main concerns is with issues around isolated seniors, something Rapp at Home is also working on.

The organization provides in-home assistance and rides to seniors, but has suspended social activities for now. In return, they're in the process of calling all their members who live alone or are caregivers of a fragile family member — around 80 people — to check in.

"One of the biggest needs that is showing up is that people are just really lonely and would like to talk," said Rapp at Home President Joyce Wenger.

They're working on a program so all members can be connected to another one in a sort of buddy system, she said. But they're also concerned about health

needs unrelated to the virus if medical services are stretched thin.

Outreach to students, families

On Monday, Gov. Ralph Northam announced that all schools would be closed for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year, which will raise additional challenges around graduation and year-end testing, and put a strain on the budget. RCPS is continuing to pay staff during the closure and has some additional resources to be able to do that, Superintendent Dr. Shannon Grimsley said Sunday, noting that if the closure is extended they're trying to petition the state for additional funding.

In response to an email Monday, Grimsley added: "It is still our intention to be sure we record and analyze all costs associated with the COVID-19 response to be considered in any waivers, direct aid, or reimbursement protocols issued by the state. At this time, we are still awaiting official guidance from the state department about how this will work."

Access to information

County administrator Garrey Curry said his office will continue to coordinate with county operations and will be putting out prepared releases in an effort to reduce confusion and rumor generation.

In addition to financial needs and calls for more cooperation, one of the biggest takeaways from the meeting was the need for information to be more easily accessible and available.

"We've got to figure out some way to centralize some of this information in a way to get it out on a regular basis," said Dietel, expressing plans to bring in more organizations as preparedness and response efforts move forward. "There are some ideas floating around right now, but this is our first stab, and I feel very good about this as a foundation going forward," she added.

School community faces major hardships from closures

BY RANDY RIELAND

For Foothills Forum

For the past week, Rappahannock County School Superintendent Dr. Shannon Grimsley has been telling people that responding to the temporary closure of Virginia schools due to the coronavirus pandemic has been like “building a plane in the air together.”

Monday afternoon, the plane hit heavy turbulence. Virginia Gov. Ralph

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Northam announced that what had been a two-week closure scheduled to end this Friday will now last for the rest of the academic year.

“School closures are necessary to minimize the speed at which COVID-19 spreads and to protect the capacity of our healthcare system,” Northam said. The governor added that the Department of Education is now focusing on waivers to relieve testing requirements and allow qualified seniors to graduate.

That has been one of Grimsley’s biggest concerns about ending the school year two and a half months early. The school district was able to react quickly when faced with a two-week shutdown, sending students home with math workbooks, reading packets and other materials that would enable them to stay on track academically. But now its efforts to keep students learning and engaged has become significantly more complicated, particularly since many families in the county don’t have access to high-speed internet.

That prevents teachers from making use of streaming video or online applications such as Zoom, which would allow classes to meet remotely through video conferencing.

“We’ve seen how limited we are in our capacity to continue instruction through distance learning,” Grimsley said. “It makes it very difficult because you have to be able to provide equity among all the students. You can’t hold students accountable or penalize them because they can’t access new material and be able to engage with it meaningfully, especially without a teacher. That’s going to be a big challenge in presenting any new material.”

In an email sent shortly after Northam’s announcement, the school said it will be distributing a survey to try to get a better handle on how many students’ families have digital needs or limited internet availability.

At the same time, seniors are now dealing with a different reality. A two-week break has turned into a grim scenario, in which some, under difficult circumstances, may need to raise their grades to graduate. There also are serious questions about the prospect of landmark events seniors have long anticipated sharing with their classmates — the Senior Prom in April and

commencement in late May. Whether or how they occur will largely depend on what restrictions related to the pandemic are still in place.

School employees, including bus drivers, will continue to be paid for now, Grimsley said. It’s too soon to gauge the financial burden of the closure, she continued, although support from the state could help cover the costs of trying to educate so many students outside the classroom. Grimsley noted that Virginia school districts have been asked to track their expenses related to the coronavirus.

The school district will continue to provide meals to students — through volunteer deliveries or pickups — and not only to those who qualify for the program, she said. “We’re feeding everyone we can. We were able to get a federal waiver so there’s really no questions asked. If a family says they need food, we can feed them.”

The district is now providing as many as 300 meals each weekday, and has a meals access hotline, 540-671-0153.

“It’s not just the learning,” Grimsley said. “It’s the well-being of our families who depend on the school system for the structure and services they need.”

Kathy Sickler, the school district’s social worker, has been playing a core role in trying to keep the schools and its students connected. She’s been making home visits and, in some cases, has delivered supplies families needed.

She said she’s concerned about the impact of social isolation, particularly now that the school year has ended so prematurely. “I view it as my responsibility to keep these kids and their families as motivated as possible, and as engaged in their school community as much as possible.”

Sickler said she’s set up some online groups to help keep classmates connected, although sketchy internet accessibility limits how extensive they can be.

Her advice to those feeling trapped in their homes?

“First, it’s very good for your mental health to go outside,” she said. “And also this is a time to tap into what your personal strengths are. Whether it’s something artistic or creative. Or maybe it’s interacting with your family members. Or supporting your friends, even if it’s only over the phone.

“Everyone is very anxious right now.”

Sen. Warner warns residents to be prepared

‘I think that [COVID-19] reality is even going to hit an idyllic place like Rappahannock County’

BY JOHN MCCASLIN
Rappahannock News staff

Virginia Sen. Mark Warner has one request of Rappahannock County residents: stay home.

“It’s going to be a rocky ride,” Warner cautioned in a telephone interview this week from his Alexandria home, where he’s quarantining with his family during the Senate recess.

“We’re just going to have to grapple with the fact that for the next couple of weeks we’re going to see numbers of people — and in places like Rappahannock County — who are getting sick go up.”



Warner, who served as Virginia’s governor from

2002-2006, said he thought he “understood” all there is to know about the novel coronavirus spreading like wild-fire around the globe.

“But now I’ve got a half-dozen friends who have it and one friend’s wife who’s been on a ventilator for three weeks, so it becomes much more real,” the senator described. “And I think that kind of coming reality is even going to hit an idyllic place like Rappahannock County.”

He predicted “the next two weeks are going to be the roughest because I think we’re going to be dealing with three things: first, the economic uncertainty, and a lot of this happened last week when people had to decide [on April 1] which bill they were going to pay: their mortgage, their landlords’ rent, or student debt.

“The second thing is we’ve got a \$2.2 trillion dollar bill which is actually more like \$6 trillion because \$400 billion of it is leveraged 10 times. . . . So it’s the biggest package in American history, but people who are economically insecure will say, ‘OK that’s great, when are we going to get the money?’

“And how hard will getting the money be, particularly for a county like Rappahannock that’s got so many



Thank you Lions — and Dida’s!

Hats off to the Rappahannock Lions, who have donated \$5,000 to support the Dida’s Distillery program to manufacture hand sanitizer for Rappahannock Fire and Rescue companies, the Food Pantry, as well as emergency providers and hospitals in the region. Dida’s, which is part of Rappahannock Cellars in Huntly, expects to reach production of 50 gallons per day. From left are Lions Jim Blubaugh and Frank Raiter and the distillery’s John Delmare and Allan Delmare.

COURTESY PHOTO

small businesses?”

The senator praised the Small Business Administration’s Paycheck Protection Program created in response to the pandemic, in which \$350 billion in government guaranteed loans from lenders would cover eight weeks of payroll plus additional expenses.

“We’ve got a very attractive plan in there . . . which would [cover] most of the businesses in Rappahannock,” he said, “but can all of those businesses apply and are they going to get the money in a fast enough way? How do we make sure that nonprofits that are eligible for this program, too, how do

they get their fair share? There’s some real administrative challenges.

“I’m not always a fan of this administration, but [Treasury Secretary] Steve Mnuchin I think has been doing a great job and I’m working with him on a daily basis trying to work out some of those kinks. That will be important to Rappahannock.”

That said, will there be a CARES 2 act — or an additional COVID-19 stimulus plan that would go even further than Congress’s just-approved CARES act meant to boost the American economy and its workers, millions of whom are now unemployed?

“There has to be,” Warner replied. “We have to look at where the holes were in this one, and a lot of that may be through local government [assistance] and again making sure we get those resources out quickly. And as large as this bill was — I believe \$6 trillion and not \$2 trillion — but as huge as those numbers are most of this is just keeping the economy on life support.

“It’s not stimulus,” explained the senator, “because you can’t spend it when people are still in lockdown.”

Finally, he warned Rappahannock residents to be prepared in the coming weeks for an expansion of COVID-19 cases, which likely won’t spare the county.

The most recent coronavirus assessment Warner was provided by pandemic experts predicted the commonwealth’s overall apex for COVID-19 cases wouldn’t be until mid-to-late May, given the amount of time it might take for the virus to take hold and proliferate in southside and southwestern portions of Virginia.

“That was the last assessment we had two days ago,” he said.

Tax Relief Deadline

The deadline to apply for tax relief for the elderly and disabled is **July 1, 2020.**

Household income limits for 2020 are \$0 - \$32,420

Please call or email us to apply. Our office is closed to the public due to COVID-19.

Commissioner of the Revenue
540-675-5370
magraham@
rappahannockcountyva.gov

4/2, 4/9, 4/16

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HOME/LAND TRANSFERS

There will be no home/land transfers for the foreseeable future.

BUILDING PERMITS

Johnny R. Pullen, Flint Hill, electric upgrade, \$1000

Elizabeth Jones, Sperryville, colocation antenna, \$30,000

Nancy David Dillon, Washington, repair drain tile, \$9,500

Robert Benyo, Washington, tankless water heater, \$5,574

BOS chair questions state of emergency

- ▶ Three county officials complain emergency declaration too restrictive
- ▶ Committee member Glennie admits to ‘baiting’ two newest supervisors

BY JOHN McCASLIN
Rappahannock News staff

It was almost two months ago on March 17 that a local “state of emergency” was declared (and subsequently ratified) by the Rappahannock County government due to the rapidly spreading COVID-19 pandemic.

Three weeks later, on April 6 and by unanimous vote of the Rappahannock County Board of Supervisors, public



VIDEO: Watch Wednesday’s Board of Supervisors meeting at rappnews.com/video

meeting and hearing practices were modified by “emergency ordinance” providing for the continuity of county government operations.

“At this time, public health experts recommend against assembling groups

of people in confined spaces,” determined the supervisors, ordering in part that for a period of 60 days unless amended “any regular scheduled or regular meeting of any public body may be held by solely electronic or telephonic means without a quorum of members physically present and without members of the public physically present.”

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But as with other areas across the country, there are some within the Rappahannock County government — in both elected and appointed positions — who now want the county to loosen its operational restrictions. And as cases of COVID-19 here have been rising.

Among the officials is Rappahannock County Board of Supervisors Chair Christine Smith, who prepared a resolution and ordinance in advance of last week's regular BOS meeting that sought to "terminate" the local emergency declaration drafted by County Administrator Garrey Curry in his role as Director of Emergency Management.

The chair's document, among other points, questioned "the constitutionality and lawfulness of these emergency measures." The supervisors were to meet Wednesday night, after this newspaper went to press, to further discuss COVID-19 emergency measures now in place.

Backing out of an emergency declaration — Rappahannock, we are told, would become the only county in the commonwealth to do so — could have implications for the county government, private sector, and public. At a minimum, an emergency declaration positions the county to request reimbursement for COVID-19 related costs through the state capital in Richmond and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

State restrictions, being softened in phases starting Friday by Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam, would also advise against termination given the current increase of coronavirus cases.

COMPLAINTS, FOIA REQUEST

Smith, as it happened, never added her measure to the May 4 meeting agenda. She told this newspaper Monday that it was a "document I was working with at that time."

"One additional detail, our meeting on Monday the 4th was simultaneous with the governor's announcement for his plans, making it incredibly challenging to take any action," she said.

In part, her draft ordinance stated that the resulting "shutdown from the State of Emergency while arguably prudent and necessary, is becoming more detrimental to our local economy, and questions have been raised concerning the effectiveness of the mandatory shutdown and confinement measures as well as with regard to the constitutionality and lawfulness of these emergency measures."

"Let's Get Back to Work," echoed Rappahannock Building Committee and Fire Levy Board member Page Glennie in a May 6 email to Smith and other board members, cc'ing Curry and County Attorney Art Goff. This newspaper obtained it and other emails through a subsequent FOIA request submitted by Glennie last week.

"So if Albemarle County can hold Planning Commission meetings to address routine business, why can't Rappahannock County hold Planning Commission meetings to address the sizable backlog of work on the Comprehensive Plan and the Zoning Ordinance?" Glennie wondered.

Excerpts of the draft resolution

Smith's original draft "resolution and ordinance" potentially "terminating local state of emergency" stated in part:

Whereas the citizens of Rappahannock County have heeded the Governor's Declaration of Emergency and observed the local state of emergency, as a result of which the COVID-19 outbreak in Rappahannock County has remained statistically low and contained, and

Whereas hospitals and other health care facilities in surrounding localities have not been overwhelmed by COVID-19 and maintained the ability adequately to respond to the pandemic, and

Whereas the shutdown from the State of Emergency while arguably prudent and necessary, is becoming more detrimental to our local economy, and questions have been raised concerning the effectiveness of the mandatory shutdown and confinement measures as well as with regard to the constitutionality and lawfulness of these emergency measures,

Whereas Article 1, Section 7 of the Constitution of Virginia provides that laws should not be suspended and that all power of suspending laws, or the execution of laws, by any authority, without consent of the representatives of the people, is injurious to their rights, and ought not to be exercised . . .

NOW THEREFORE, be it RESOLVED and ORDAINED by the Board of Supervisors of Rappahannock County, Virginia hereby **ORDERS:**

(1) The Declaration of Local Emergency by Garrey W. Curry issued on March 17, 2020, pursuant to Virginia Code § 44-146.21 be and it is hereby terminated effective [immediately] or [as of _____, 2020];

(2) That in order to restore the vibrant life, economic health, and personal liberty of the people of Rappahannock County, the Rappahannock County Board of Supervisors hereby petitions and requests the Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia to include Rappahannock County as a locality where advanced easing of restrictions may take place on an expedited timetable in Phase One of the "Forward Virginia" Blueprint . . .

Record of the roll-call vote on motion to approve the foregoing resolution, said vote taken by the Board of Supervisors of Rappahannock County, Virginia, at an emergency meeting held at the Rappahannock County County Library, Town of Washington, Rappahannock County, Virginia, on May 4, 2020."

"Why can't the Building Committee get back to work on the many infrastructure issues? Why can't the Fire Levy Board review the Fire and Rescue Strategic Plan? . . . There are many very important tasks that need to get done. The backlog of work was bad before. We are now digging an even bigger hole.

"With so many other activities being curtailed, what better time is there to get work done?" he concluded. "It is apparent that the county's working definition of essential business is too restrictive. Have we asked Richmond for clarification or guidance? BTW: I can't remember any committee meeting where 10 people showed up, and besides Zoom can be used. Please get back to work."

Less than 48 hours later, after Glennie had not received an official reply from Smith, he wrote to Curry:

"I have not received an answer to this email, more less an acknowledgement of receipt. I understand it is not your responsibility to respond to me directly, nor did I expect you to. However, I am confident that you would not let something like this just go without providing input to the board. Consequently, I request [under FOIA] all correspondence (to or from) between any of the addressees (both to and cc)."

In under two hours' time, Curry wrote back to Glennie, copying the BOS and Goff: "Find attached responsive documents to your FOIA request. Note, the emails from the accounts of Curry, Donehey, Goff, Parrish, and Whitson all included the same emails (all copied to each other), I extracted them from my account so as to not have to pull five different files with the same set of emails. The emails from the accounts for Frazier and Smith had additional email traffic, so they are provided separately."

Glennie, it turns out, had in fact heard back from Supervisor Ron Frazier moments after sending his May 6 missive imploring the county to return to work. "Well," Frazier wrote, "I mentioned the same thing during Wednesday's meeting most specifically the 'Building Comm.' I wonder, is it because certain people have more power or authority under lock down? or, in the case of the County Atty. less questions concerning his performance?"

Frazier has been repeatedly critical of Goff in the past.

Five minutes later, Glennie wrote back to Frazier, going so far as to acknowledge: "Yes I know. I'm baiting [Supervisors] Keir [Whitson] and Debbie [Donehey], particularly Debbie, into a response. If Garrey responds, I'll emphasize I wanted a response for BOS members, not the Director of Emergency Management."

ADMINISTRATIVE GUIDANCE

Curry, meanwhile, had assured the supervisors upon receiving Glennie's original email: "Neither Art nor I think that the 'continuity of government' requires the actions listed as an example from Albemarle, and we are understandably conservative when it comes to FOIA issues. We need to look no further than back to last weekend when we received letters from a local attorney questioning our authority to even proceed with electronic meetings with the very conservative method we are using. Albemarle may have to defend how they have chosen to interpret COV [Code of Virginia] Section 15.2-1413, not us.

"That said, I committed during the [BOS] meeting on Monday to work with the county attorney to review the new HB29 language [Governor Northam's

COVID-19 declarations channel] that appears to broaden what we can do and let the board know our thoughts. I have no interest in attracting another FOIA lawsuit, particularly while I am your FOIA officer. Other localities may not have ever had the pleasure of having a FOIA lawsuit."

Continued Curry: "Nothing in what the board already passed disallows the board from holding in person meetings. The county attorney and I have discussed that there could be liability if people get sick and blame the county for having a meeting as the path (contact tracing) through which they were infected. Is it worth it? The governor has laid out his plan and I suggest that the reintroduction of non-electronic meetings be linked to Phases 1/2/3 that he proposed. We may enter Phase 1 on May 15, if the date is not further pushed back, and small groups of less than 10 would be supported by the governor."

Finally, this guidance: "The chairs of your committee can hand out 'assignments' to be carried out by individual committee members for input to other committee members at their next meeting. As long as there is no communications among three or more members on a rapid basis (approaching simultaneously), it would not be a FOIA issue."

Upon receiving Curry's guidance, Supervisor Whitson wrote back: "Well said, Garrey, and much appreciated."

To which Smith replied the morning of May 7: "Respectfully, chairs call meetings, not staff. It's a shame that some six weeks into this we still have no clear guidance by which to operate. Events this past weekend showed how dangerous it is to be in a state of 'reaction: I suppose I should be happy that someone is getting around to it next week . . ."

Minutes later, Smith enquired of Curry: "Have you or Art asked other localities for the basis of their continued operations? As in many other instances, it would be nice not to reinvent the wheel on this. I know you have many other demands on your time."

Curry responded: "I have reviewed other locality continuity of government ordinances. I'm not sure anyone has really gotten their arms around the new language from HB29, but I will be on the lookout."

Frazier, at the same time, forwarded to Glennie for the first time Curry's original email to the BOS, telling the committees member: "I missed the fact that Garrey did not reply to you, just the board, I guess Keir [Whitson] missed it too but didn't send to you thanking Garrey for his response."

All said and done, the BOS last night (Wednesday) was expected to further discuss dialing back Rappahannock's emergency declaration. Smith told the News on Monday that Curry has drafted a new document "at the request of me and other board members, so as this situation unwinds we will have options in place to resume business in the county, including government business. It's a matter of timing on these things, to be sure.

"I'd like to have a constructive conversation as a board about what benefits we see from the declared state of emergency, rather than just have it in place because everyone else does," Smith explained.

SIX MONTHS OF COVID IN RAPPAHANNOCK

Where we've been, where we
are, where we're going

BY JOHN MCCASLIN
Rappahannock News staff

It's been exactly six months since the first resident of Rappahannock County, an unidentified man in his 40s experiencing mild symptoms, tested positive for COVID-19.

Until that inevitable day in early April, Rappahannock somehow managed to keep the spreading virus at bay — one of less than a handful of counties in the entire state to do so despite being in the shadow of the COVID-burgeoning nation's capital.

Even now, in the half-year since SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) reared its ugly head here, Rappahannock continues to have among the lowest COVID-19 case counts in the commonwealth of Virginia — and easily the fewest number of coronavirus infections in the five-county Rappahannock-Rapidan Health District (RRHD) that includes more heavily populated Fauquier, Culpeper, Madison and Orange.

“The main reason is that as I drive through Rappahannock County and meet the people and go to meet-

“ If we are vigilant ... I think we can go through the winter and still be as we are right now, which is probably in a good place.”

Regional health director Dr. Wade Kartchner

COVID

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ings there I do know that more than any county in our district they sort of live the socially-distanced lifestyle to begin with,” says Dr. Wade Kartchner, RRHD’s Warrenton-based health director.

“That in and of itself provides a layer of protection that really nobody else has, maybe Madison is the next closest. People just aren’t piled on top of each other.”

For that matter, given its mostly bucolic setting, RRHD — among 35 health districts carved into the commonwealth by the Virginia Department of Health — has similarly been spared much of the pandemic’s misery.

“I would say we are in the bottom third as far as cases per 100,000 people,” Dr. Kartchner educates. “I think it has a lot to do with the rural nature of the district, the fact there are no large universities, and with few exceptions no large businesses either where you would have people congregating.

“And to go along with that rural aspect we don’t have a lot of, for the lack of the better term, the inner-city housing congregation of people that say Alexandria might have. Country mouse and city mouse,” he puts it. “Alexandria is [almost] the same population as we are. But the metrics are quite different when you look at them.”

As of Monday, Culpeper County (pop. 52,605) led RRHD’s overall COVID-19 count with 1,199 cases. Followed by Fauquier’s (pop. 71,222) 939 positive results, Orange’s (pop. 36,644) 327 cases, Madison’s (pop. 13,261) 109, and finally Rappahannock (pop. 7,370), where 63 citizens have been infected.

All told, only 2,630 residents of RRHD — its combined population numbering 181,102 — have tested positive for the coronavirus. That’s fewer than 1.5 percent.

With 159,428 residents, Alexandria comparably is less populated than RRHD, however the mixed urban and residential city bordering Washington, DC has seen 3,825 residents — 2.4 percent of its population — test positive for the virus through Monday.

At the same time, Alexandria has endured 69 COVID-related deaths, while in the Rappahannock-Rapidan district 51 residents have succumbed to the virus — two in Rappahannock County.

Of course, numerous factors weigh into the devastating impacts of a pandemic, not the least being its toll on minority populations, including within RRHD. Then there are the struggling college campus settings.

“In our region we have the Central Shenandoah Health District [and] they’ve got JMU [James Madison University] and a couple of other [colleges],” Dr. Kartchner points out. “Shenandoah University is in the Lord Fairfax district. And you’ve got Mary Washington [College] over on the Fredericksburg side.

“We sort of sit — I like to think of it as a donut hole in education, at least in higher education — that all we have are two small community college satellite campuses in our entire [RRHD] district. Some people might bemoan that as a lack of higher education opportunities in the health district, but it has played well for us as far as that student [virus] transmission that we’ve seen here in the last two months as colleges have opened. And I think that’s been a blessing for us.”

Rare summer lull

Hope had existed this past spring, when the first cases of COVID-19 surfaced that the United States, that the country would experience a virus lull once the warmer temperatures of summer arrived — a pattern seen during the 1918 pandemic, when the springtime



BY JOHN MCCASLIN

Dr. Wade Kartchner oversees the five-county Rappahannock-Rapidan Health District that includes Rappahannock County, which has seen one of the lowest COVID-19 case counts in Virginia: “People just aren’t piled on top of each other.”

cases, or first wave, all but vanished during the summer, albeit followed by a more explosive second wave in the fall.

With the stubborn 2020 pandemic the first wave has never abated, with certain regions of the country today experiencing new spikes of COVID on top of previous spikes. Among the smaller percentage of exceptions is the Rappahannock-Rapidan Health District.

“Nationally no,” agrees Dr. Kartchner. “But I think we here in the [RRHD] district did see a summer lull. We had some big spikes in March and April and going into May. We did dwindle down through July and then we’ve been kind of steady ever since, with some exceptions of outbreaks in certain places [as with one church in Rappahannock County]. But other than that it’s been slowly steady.”

To date, RRHD’s largest outbreaks have occurred in retirement homes and churches, which also account for most of the mortalities. In Rappahannock County, many of the COVID cases — and both of its deaths — can be traced to the Massanova Pentecostal Church in Castleton and its week-long revival in late June that attracted congregations from multiple regional churches.

According to one witness, most participants shunned masks and didn’t practice social distancing. Within weeks, Massanova’s pastor, Rev. Lindsey D. Savage, died. Another congregant, a woman who lived in the town of Washington, also succumbed.

“The majority of our congregation has already had COVID,” Massanova’s new pastor, Kelsey Villines, has since acknowledged. “I think around 32 people in our church tested positive ... [so] we’re all hopefully carrying antibodies and we can’t get it again.”

Among the first reported COVID deaths within the Rappahannock-Rapidan district was an elderly couple who attended St. Peter Catholic Church in Wash-

ington, according to a source outside of RRHD. They lived just across the Rappahannock County line in the Amisville section of Culpeper.

What about recoveries?

A complaint often voiced in Rappahannock County is that one often hears about people being infected with — and especially dying from — COVID-19, yet very little is said about those who have recovered from the otherwise risky virus, which as of this week has killed 205,000 Americans and counting.

“The bottom line,” answers Dr. Kartchner, “is that the [VDH] contact tracers, the case investigators, have so much work to do just to follow up those [positive cases] every single day — and things are coming in every day — that frankly the resources don’t exist to continue to follow up.

“In essence what we do ... we discuss with the [positive] case and all of their contacts what they need to do, how they need to isolate, and how they need to quarantine. And then they are handed off as needed to the medical community.

“What people don’t realize,” he continues, “is that we don’t do that follow up, or obtain the recovery data or information, on any other infectious disease. If we have a measles outbreak ... or whooping cough we don’t follow them out for months.

“I go back to ‘yes’ — virtually everybody recovers [from COVID-19]. And I think it’s worthwhile to note that if they’re not winding up ... in the mortality statistics you can assume that virtually everybody else has recovered. And I put that in quotation marks, ‘recovered.’ I mean every disease that anybody gets is going to have a certain percentage of those with perhaps some long term [impacts]. But really that’s outside the purview of the public

health system to follow those out and it’s more an aspect of the healthcare system in general.”

‘An even greater danger’

Speaking with the Rappahannock News at a picnic table outside the main RRHD office in Warrenton, the mask-wearing Dr. Kartchner expands on the other seldom discussed impacts — mental health, substance abuse, shutting down the economy, among others — COVID-19 is having on the community.

“It’s really hard to determine yet how bad it is,” he reflects. “There are some indicators, we see evidence perhaps, with more of an uptick in opioid cases, overdose cases. But I really think this is going to play out over years and years and we probably won’t know the extent of it until deep in retrospect.”

In this newspaper’s commentary pages last month, the RRHD health director didn’t hold back when discussing the “collateral damage” of the virus. In fact, as early as March 23 — one week before Rappahannock County’s first positive COVID case — he wrote in an email to Dr. M. Normal Oliver, the state’s health commissioner:

“With the institution of ever-increasingly drastic measures to curb the spread of the virus, I see perhaps an even greater danger in destroying the economy through such measures, with the resultant ramifications that brings to society and the long-term health of its citizens. We know from a population health perspective that one of the major determinants of health is the economic well-being of a person and society. I am concerned that a narrow focus on ‘flattening the curve’ in the short-term is taking precedence over the loss of life in the long term, as this entire cohort of people who are at significant risk of losing jobs, health insurance, homes, and savings suffers from suicide, ➔

➔ abuse, increased morbidity and mortality from untreated or poorly treated conditions, mental health crises, divorce, and increased drug and alcohol abuse.”

He cited a respected JAMA medical report since then showing where “this has indeed occurred. COVID-19 has tripled the rate of depression symptoms in US adults, particularly among those with financial worries, and this rise in depression is much greater than after previous traumatic national events such as 9-11 or the Ebola outbreak.”

Dr. Kartchner explains to this newspaper: “The reason I write those things, and it’s probably a little different than most of my colleagues, is that I really try to provide a balance, combined with what I think is important from my experience and from my time as a health director and my reading of the literature. So I’ve received feedback when I write those things that yes, that’s true, and no, that’s wrong.”

He pauses and smiles. “So if I get both of those I figure I’m probably hitting it right in the middle.”

Appointed RRHD’s health director in early 2016, Dr. Kartchner knows all too well about “collateral damage” to a community. For almost a decade, until arriving in Virginia to be closer to a son attending law school, the pediatrician was Public Health Director of Navajo County, Arizona — in that capacity overseeing, in part, portions of the Navajo Nation and surrounding Hopi and Fort Apache Indian Reservations.

The tremendous toll that COVID-19 has taken on that American Indian community alone hasn’t gone unnoticed.

“The Native Americans, particularly in that part of the United States — it hit early and they got hit really hard,” he says. “It’s been sad to see that.”

Where to from here?

For most Americans the coming months will be a stressful period of uncertainty, better spent outside. Health experts have been advising ever since the coronavirus arrived in the country that it’s far safer for a person to be outdoors, where the highly-contagious virus spreads less easily, than in indoor environments.

“I think that [indoor] concern is well placed,” Dr. Kartchner states. “What we are really noticing in this [Rappahannock-Rapidan] district, and I think it applies everywhere, is that we really don’t see a big uptick in cases, we don’t see a lot of transmission, outside of those [indoor] events ... outside of those [indoor] settings.

“Obviously the nursing home settings are even more problematic because people are sort of confined to an area, they can’t leave it if they wanted to. But other settings, and you have to rope schools in with those as well — schools and churches [or] any large event is going to be the opportunity for the virus to really spread.”

Which brings us to a vaccine. Optimistically, any COVID-19 vaccine proven to be effective is still months away — certainly not available for any widespread distribution until after winter is upon us.

“I’m optimistic that [a vaccine] will be safe and effective when it comes out. I’ll be getting it,” assures Dr. Kartchner. “I don’t see it really going away until we pass that part of the timeline.”

In the meantime, there’s another important vaccine now available.

“The best message is to indeed get a flu shot,” the health director recommends, especially to elderly residents of Rappahannock County who are at an increased risk to both the seasonal flu and COVID. What’s dubbed a coronavirus-and-flu “twin-demic.”



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“It is a concern,” says the doctor. “So far it’s looking like there shouldn’t be issues with that, but as we’ve seen during the last six months there have been many predictions that have gone sideways. One positive note, I was reading a study the other day [where] the flu season in the Southern Hemisphere countries this summer has been almost zero.

“And it’s a consequence, I think, of us and particularly them ... as they follow social distancing and masking that they have inadvertently prevented a lot of flu cases. My hope is that as we continue to try to prevent COVID we’ll also as a secondary effect see a lower incidence of flu this winter as well. And so really the message is get your flu shot and let’s continue to do those things that we’re doing right now.”

As in social distancing, wearing masks, and washing hands, which the doctor is constantly prescribing to local residents.

“If we are vigilant on those [indoor settings this winter] and don’t allow those to happen — or we take precautions I think is a better way to say it — if we do that I think we will still see just a small smoldering sort of ‘case here and case there’ type of transmission,” Dr. Kartchner predicts.

“And that’s kind of where we’ve been [in Rappahannock-Rapidan] except for when it gets into a nursing home, or gets into a church. But if people are smart and do that [then] I think we can go through the winter and still be as we are right now, which is probably in a good place.”

SCHOOLS FACE COVID-19 HURDLES

- ➔ Forty-four percent of high schoolers are failing;
- ➔ RCES staffer tests positive for virus

BY RACHEL NEEDHAM
Rappahannock News Staff

On the heels of Rappahannock County High School Principal Jimmy Swindler searching for ways to reduce an estimated 44 percent of students currently failing due to incomplete or late work, it was announced this week that an elementary school staffer has tested positive for the coronavirus.

Welcome to schooling in the age of COVID-19.

In an email to teachers last Thursday, Swindler reminded teachers that “what we all have to understand is that if we move forward with a 40+% failure rate it won’t be long before the good folks from the VDOE’s School Improvement Team come knocking at our door, and I am pretty sure that NONE of us wish to see that scenario unfold.”

Swindler suggested giving students “reboot days” to catch up on overdue assignments and incomplete work. “Hold off on new instruction and do all you can with your students to get them caught up, which will in turn improve

their grades,” he wrote.

“Late next week we will reassess where we are RE our overall student performance and then move forward with decisions on grades/grade reports for this quarter.”

In an email to the Rappahannock News, Swindler denied any allegations that the RCPS administration has encouraged teachers to change grades.

“That is NOT one of the strategies we discussed,” Swindler wrote.

Alluding to the pandemic which has exerted unprecedented pressure on teachers and students, Swindler continued: “I think it’s safe to say that the environment itself constitutes an ‘extenuating circumstance’ RE justifying the need to give students some extra assistance. We are all in this together and the problems we are having are being repeated all across the state.”

Swindler added that in Zoom calls with school administrators and principals he has heard that “EVERYONE is having the same challenges with remote learning.”

RCPS made the decision in August to resume school on a hybrid model which combines two days of in-person classes with three days of remote learning.

One teacher who wished to remain anonymous told this newspaper that even in a normal school year it is difficult to strike the delicate balance between leniency—accepting late work without penalty, for example—and holding students to a rigorous standard.

“As teachers we have this duality where on one hand we want to teach the kids content and encourage them to try to learn and on the other hand we want to teach them to be model adults, which is turning things in on time,” the teacher said.

The teacher added that earlier in the semester school administrators had asked faculty to put zeros on students’ report cards for incomplete work thinking it would “wake them up,” but now it seems they need to try a different approach. “We’re aiming to be flexible with the kids and not discourage them from trying.”

Superintendent Shannon Grimsley agreed. “As trauma-informed educators,” Grimsley said in an interview, “we can presume that this time is traumatic for students and their families. Seeing a zero on a report card is reflective of challenges with the remote learning model, not necessarily of teachers or their students.”

And as for the students who have done all their work and managed to maintain high marks throughout, Swindler and Grimsley emphasized that they would not be affected. “This is not about penalizing anyone, it’s about supporting all of our students through this incredibly difficult time.”

NEW COVID-19 CASE

On Monday night RCPS sent an email and automated voice message to parents alerting them that an administrative employee tested positive over the weekend. The staff member was not on school premises on Monday and all areas with which the individual had been in direct contact have been sanitized.

“At this time, due to the proce-

dures and physical distancing protocols implemented by RCPS, it has been determined after thoroughly investigating locally that there were no close contacts with any students and very limited contact with staff members, and therefore no known high risk of transmission of COVID-19 at the elementary school,” wrote Superintendent Shannon Grimsley in her letter to parents.

Staff members who came into close contact with the individual have been asked to quarantine and await further instructions from the Virginia Department of Health. The Rappahannock Rapidan Health Department has opened an investigation to contact trace and determine if any other individuals will need to quarantine.

The VDH defines close contact as being within six feet of an infected person for 15 minutes or more. The VDH provides resources and information about COVID-19 at www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/



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Inspiring Thoughts by Randy Minter



WHEN A PARENT IS LEFT BEHIND

Losing a parent is a heartbreaking experience, and it is only increased by witnessing the sorrow of the spouse left behind and not knowing how to help. There are things, however, you can do for your grieving parent to make things a bit more bearable. Give him or her as much time as needed to process the loss, but encourage friends and other family members to visit. After some time has passed, if it seems appropriate, suggest a support group to foster discussion with others who are going through the same experience. If help is needed with daily chores or home maintenance, consider hiring help if you are unable to do it yourself.

The death of a spouse can present a complicated set of difficulties for the bereaved person. These issues go beyond having to handle their grief since the surviving spouse may need immediate help handling basic day-to-day responsibilities. When planning a service, you have many options available to you and **MOSER FUNERAL HOME (540-347-3431)** will do all that we can to provide a beautiful and respectful ceremony. We invite you to tour our facility, conveniently located at 233 Broadview Ave., Warrenton. We’ll also tell you about our **BRIGHT VIEW CEMETERY**, just outside of Warrenton.

“Death or life will take him from your minds. I know, whispered Despair, in her distant, empty voice. But I shall remember him.”

— Neil Gaiman