

INSIDE  
WOMEN RULE THE ICE  
ON LAKE DARLING  
OUTDOORS, B4



Alexandria ▶▶

# ECHO PRESS

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## Schools plan for state-imposed closings

By Ross Evavold  
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How do you set up new child care plans in a couple of days? How will children continue to get school meals when schools are

closed? And if schools don't resume in April or even May, how will teachers be able to teach their students? The Alexandria and Brandon-Evansville school boards met Monday night, and those were

just a few of the questions being asked. The tall tasks were set in place on Sunday morning when, in response to the coronavirus pandemic, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz announced that all of the state's K-12 schools were

closing from Wednesday, March 18, through at least Friday, March 27. That sent schools throughout Minnesota scrambling to come up with plans before sending kids home for a minimum of eight weekdays, and

quite possibly longer. "The weekend changed our lives in a pretty drastic way," Alexandria Superintendent Julie Critz told the school board. Some schools, such as Alexandria and Brandon-Evansville, canceled class-

es Monday and used that time to formulate plans of how to prepare students with an assortment of instructional materials by the end of the day Tuesday. Others, such as

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## A COOL FUNDRAISER



Lowell Anderson / Echo Press

Participants gasp after jumping into cold water during the Cool School Plunge outside of Discovery Middle School last Thursday. The event raised almost \$31,000 for Special Olympics and Discovery middle school. For more photos see Life, page A6.

## Nursing homes implement no-visitor restrictions

By Ross Evavold  
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A no-visitor policy was implemented Thursday, March 12, at Bethany on the Lake and Knute Nelson Care Center, as the two Alexandria nursing homes jointly took precautions to protect its residents and staff against coronavirus.

By noon Friday, Knute Nelson had extended that policy to its other senior living buildings in Alexandria, Nelson Gables and Grand Arbor.

In addition, Nelson Wellness Center and Pioneer Grill, both at Grand Arbor, were closed to the public starting at that time.

"We made this decision to be proactive in our efforts to safeguard and protect our residents who call Grand Arbor and Nelson Gables home as well as to mitigate the potential exposure and spread of COVID-19," Knute Nelson President/CEO Mark Anderson said.

The additional precautions were taken following further recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, World Health Organization, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and other health agencies, according to a statement from Knute Nelson.

While visitors are being banned at the Knute Nelson properties and Bethany on the Lake, limited visitors may be allowed in instances such as end-of-life or special circumstances. Emergency situations/visits will be considered on an individual basis, and will be limited to minimize exposure beyond the family member, said a joint statement from the nursing homes.

Residents of Nelson Gables and Grand Arbor may continue to use the wellness centers at those facilities, and Pioneer Grill will also remain open to Grand Arbor residents.

Members of the Nelson Wellness Center who do not reside at Grand Arbor were encouraged to exercise for the time being at the Alexandria YMCA at no additional cost. The Y and Knute Nelson have an existing partnership agreement. However, the YMCA announced Monday that it was temporarily suspending access to its health and wellness facility.

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Submitted by / Knute Nelson

Grand Arbor

## Demand runs high for virus testing

Three-day lag time for COVID-19 testing likely to grow, Alomere says

By Karen Tolkkinen  
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Demand for COVID-19 testing has been so intense that Alomere Health in Alexandria says it's facing a longer wait time to get an answer back from the Department of Health — and that patients with severe symptoms are likely to be sent to CentraCare St. Cloud Hospital.

"There's unfortunately a three-day delay in getting results back," said Dr. Deb Dittberner, medical director for Alomere Health. "It's going to be longer than three days soon."

Private labs are trying to develop testing capabilities, but for now, the clinic is having to make decisions on

care without having test results. When patients seek help for upper respiratory issues, the hospital and clinic first test them for influenza, she said. If those tests are negative, then they test for COVID-19. Alomere has sent about 30 samples to the health department in St. Paul, and the results sent back so far have all been negative for COVID-19, she said. They have not gotten all results back. "We have had numerous patients that have tested positive for influenza," said Alomere Chief Executive Officer Carl Vaagenes.

On Monday, March 16, Minnesota had 54 confirmed cases of COVID-19, according to the Minnesota Department

of Health, up from 14 on Friday, March 13, and five cases on Wednesday, March 11. There have been no reported COVID-19 cases in Douglas County.

### Drive-through site offers COVID-19 test

Alomere and Sanford Clinic are asking all patients with fever and cough to call before coming in. A drive-through test site established on the north end of the hospital can conduct tests while patients remain in their vehicles. Alomere and Sanford doctors are both referring patients

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## State to close bars, restaurants

By Dana Ferguson  
Forum News Service  
Gov. Tim Walz on Monday, March 16, called for the closure of bars and restaurants for dine-in customers in the state in an effort to curb the spread of the coronavirus. The announcement comes as the state reported 19 more positive tests for COVID-19, boosting Minnesota's total to 54 cases. Walz signed an executive order also closing theaters, museums, gyms, community clubs and other areas where community trans-

mission could occur. He said taking the action to close the gathering spaces between Tuesday, March 17 at 5 p.m. to March 27, could help limit new cases. Grocery stores and pharmacies were set to remain open. "For us in Minnesota, I'm going to ask once again, we need folks' cooperation," Walz said. "We need to stop congregating, we're going to close the bars, we're going to close the restaurants, we're going to close the places where we gather."

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## Area events canceled or postponed, businesses close due to coronavirus

By Celeste Edenloff  
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In response to the growing concerns over the coronavirus pandemic, events around the area are being canceled or rescheduled, and some businesses are temporarily closing or have restrictions. As this situation is so fluid and changes are taking place constantly, the newspaper will do its best to keep an updated list on its website. Here are the most up-to-date cancellations, postponements and closings:  
▶ The Douglas County Historical Society

will not be available for walk-in research or tours. The staff can take research requests by phone at 320-762-0382 or email at historic@dchsmn.org.  
▶ Beginning on March 18, Bremer Bank will close its lobby. The drive-thru will still be open.  
▶ ALP Utilities closed its office to public access effective March 17 until further notice. ALP will be conducting business as normally as possible. Customers can mail

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