

OPINION



Lowell Anderson / Echo Press
A makeshift sign thanking first responders stands next to a dinosaur statue wearing a mask along Carlos Darling Drive north of Alexandria last week.

VIEWS BY THE ECHO PRESS EDITORIAL BOARD

THUMBS UP/ THUMBS DOWN

Inspiring acts of kindness

Thumbs Up: All the positive stories that keep rolling in during these isolating times are inspiring. There are so many acts of kindness going on – people checking in on friends and neighbors, picking up groceries for those who can’t, running errands for others, dropping off goodies for essential workers, giving encouraging notes to mail carriers and bus drivers delivering meals, sewing thousands of masks, blessing local pastors, delivering care packages for hospital workers and a myriad of other good deeds. Alexandria’s good deeds and resiliency caught the attention of U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar who held a conference call with local community leaders Tuesday. “I’ve been following everything you’ve been doing in Alexandria, from the horror of the downtown fire...followed by the national global crisis with the pandemic,” Klobuchar said. “It’s amazing and inspiring to read what you’ve been doing.”

Questionable violations

Thumbs Down: People should be heeding the governor’s stay-at-home order. However, some of the first citations that have been issued to those for allegedly violating the order are questionable at best. As of Monday, April 6, eight people in Minnesota were charged with violating the emergency orders. In Dakota County, for instance, two people were cited with the violation, along with other charges, for shooting paint-balls at a residence – something they shouldn’t have been doing outside, authorities claimed. In Cottage Grove, a woman was charged for violating the emergency order, along with having a revoked license, after an officer familiar with her “very lengthy history,” according to police, pulled her over. The police captain said the officer had reason to believe the woman’s outing did not meet the state order’s allowable exceptions. A clear violation – such as a tobacco shop owner in Maplewood who refused to close his store – is one thing but using the stay-at-home orders to pile on extra charges or stop drivers is an overreach.

Help for smokers

Thumbs Up: Here’s a new resource that can help people end their smoking habit: Quit Partner, a toll-free hotline at 1-800-QUIT-NOW. It was launched by the Minnesota Department of Health this month and it includes an array of programs to help people who want to quit smoking, vaping, chewing or using other

commercial tobacco products. Quit Partner offers many free support options and resources so people can quit in a way that works best for them. Quit Partner, available online, by phone and by mail, is a convenient way for Minnesotans to improve their health during the COVID-19 outbreak so they don’t have to go at it alone. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, smoking can compromise the immune system, which makes people at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19. People can use as many of the support resources as they would like and can access them from home. Using coaching and medication together can more than double a person’s chance of successfully quitting. “Our goal is to provide free quitting help to Minnesota residents when they want it and in the way that best meets their quitting needs. Most people who smoke want to quit, and we’re here to help,” said Minnesota Commissioner of Health Jan Malcolm.

Reducing child abuse risks

Thumbs Up: As part of National Child Abuse Prevention Month (April), health and human services leaders encourages all individuals and organizations to play a role in making their communities a better place for children and families. Todd County Health and Human Services point out that research shows that protective factors are present in healthy families and that promoting these factors is among the most effective ways to reduce the risk of child abuse and neglect. They include: nurturing and attachment; knowledge of parenting and of child and youth development; parental resilience; social connections; concrete supports for parents; and social and emotional competence of children.

Downplaying a health threat

Thumbs Down: There are still some people out there who believe the coronavirus isn’t a serious health threat. One of the commenters on our Facebook page was convinced it’s not even a pandemic. Here’s a dose of reality: On April 6, COVID-19 was the third leading cause of death (1,182) in the U.S. Heart disease (1,774 deaths) and cancer (1,641 deaths) ranked first and second. Health experts project that it will become No. 1 during peak days in April.

If you have a suggestion for a Thumbs Up/Thumbs Down, email it to aedenloff@echopress.com or mail it to Echo Press, P.O. Box 549, Alexandria, MN 56308.

Submitting letters to the editor:

The Echo Press encourages readers to voice their opinions through letters to the editor. Please, however, keep your letters brief and to the point. Letters of more than 300 words or excessively long letters may be edited to a shorter form by the newspaper staff. Personal attacks against private individuals will not be printed. All letters must be signed and include the writer’s address and telephone number. Letters published will include the writer’s name and the city of residence only. Writers are limited to publishing one letter every 30 days. Submissions can be emailed to aedenloff@echopress.com or submitted to the Echo Press office at 225 7th Ave. E., Alexandria, MN 56308. For information, call (320) 763-3133.

IT’S OUR TURN

Finding inspiration away from the office

I love all the encouraging messages people are putting on storefront windows and marquees. There’s chalk art on sidewalks and on the trail, many containing words of encouragement.

These are strange times for newspaper reporters and editors.

We’re holding meetings on Zoom, communicating regularly through Google Hangouts, practicing social



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News Editor

gathering news and editing from my makeshift office in the spare bedroom. Next week, I realized, will be the longest streak I’ve been away from the newspaper office in my 35 years with the paper. (I’m not one to take long vacations.)

It has some advantages, such as wearing more comfortable clothes. I’ve ditched my shirt and tie and dress shoes for tennis shoes, jeans and a quarter-zip sweatshirt. But I really miss that camaraderie of the office, the laughter, the energy, the banter.

But I’m not complaining. I still have a job. My wife and I are still healthy.

And we, like everyone else out there, are very much looking forward to the day when we get on the

other side of this.

In the meantime, when I’ve made an essential trip to the grocery store, or am out on a walk, the reporter in me comes out and I’ve noticed a few things – good, bad and other.

► People in the grocery stores are much more focused. There’s not a lot of dilly-dallying or chit-chat with other shoppers and most are standing six feet apart. Some, however, are in such a hurry to get done and out, they break the six-foot social distancing advice to almost elbow people out of the way to grab what they need.

► Store clerks that I’ve encountered are doing an excellent job. They’re friendly and helpful despite the risks they face. At the checkout, I thank them for doing a good job and I can tell they appreciate it. Maybe more people should be doing that.

► The Central Lakes Trail is busier than ever – runners, walkers, bikers, skateboarders, and a lot more dog walkers. (And please, dog owners, remember to clean up after your pet.)

► I love all the encouraging messages people are putting on storefront windows and marquees. There’s chalk art on sidewalks and on the trail, many containing words of encouragement. The positivity is a much needed beam of hope these days.

► People’s creativity in dealing with the isolation is cool to see, whether it’s birthday drive-by

parades, having virtual happy hours, window visits with someone in a nursing home, or “getting together” with friends and relatives through video conferencing.

► For the most part, local residents are abiding by the governor’s stay-at-home orders, which, remember, does contain some exceptions, such as enjoying outdoor activities and getting groceries, gas, take-out food and emergency supplies. Traffic is down. The streets are much emptier.

► Liquor stores seem busier. A popular Facebook meme sums it up: “For the third time this week, I’m buying booze for the next two weeks.”

No one knows for sure how long this isolation will last, but I think it’s important to remain at least cautiously optimistic that better days are coming soon. Instead of giving into fear and dwelling on worst-case scenarios, we need to keep following health directives, stay upbeat, lean on one another and soldier on.

We also need to keep supporting the local businesses that drive our economy, which, by the way, also includes your local newspaper. So I’ll end this column with a shameless plea to readers: Please keep reading the Echo Press. A digital subscription costs less than \$2.31/week – less than a cup of coffee a week. You can view all our subscription offers at www.echopress.com/subscribe.

COMMENTARY

Knute Nelson safeguards residents, staff

By Mark Anderson, president/CEO of Knute Nelson, Alexandria, MN

Every day we are inundated with information from a myriad of sources about the coronavirus (COVID-19). For months now at Knute Nelson, we have been preparing for the eventual spread of COVID-19. We have enacted a multitude of precautions out of concern for the safety and well-being of those we serve and our staff – and the focused attention on their safety and well-being will continue far beyond the virus.

We have the privilege of caring for older adults in a wide variety of settings, including our home and community-based services (home care and hospice) as well as in our residential buildings. Upon early notice of the potential impact COVID-19 could have in our communities, we took several immediate steps out of precaution to safeguard our residents and staff.

We wanted to share a few of these highlights, including:

► Restricting visitors at all locations to enter any residential building unless there are certain end-of-life situations. This includes volunteer and entertainment services.

► Screening all visitors and staff who enter any residential building and requiring them to meet stringent visit protocols.

► Temporarily closing all community spaces to the public, including the Nelson Wellness Center and Pioneer Grill.

► Encouraging residents to refrain from leaving their apartments and/or defined, designated areas.

► Enacting masking, dining and social distancing recommendations for residents and staff.

► Implementing key clinical protocols to ensure resident safety and well-being. We have been working closely with

the area hospitals to ensure common understanding of safety measures being provided, treatment and areas for isolation in the event of an outbreak.

► Keeping residents and their families as well as staff regularly informed and educated on COVID-19 and encouraging good hygiene.

These decisions are not easy as we recognize how valuable family and community connections are; however, we have done this for the safety of everyone concerned.

The Minnesota Department of Health reports that as of April 6, the majority of cases are among those living in private residences. Long-term care facilities are yet another source where cases are located; however, not in the majority.

We’ve always been a mission-driven organization and know the vital importance of our work caring for those we serve as well as other staff. Throughout this time, we’ve become even more laser-focused on what this truly means — and are grateful for our teams who are providing courageous leadership and care especially during times we’re experiencing now.

At the same time, we have expanded options to keep loved ones connecting by introducing an KN e-Konnect program that our staff facilitate. We have increased one-to-one activities, held activities following social distancing recommendations, increased our music and spiritual care programming to name a few. Our staff are continuously introducing creative ways to keep residents engaged as best we’re able during this time.

We will continue to be vigilant with our efforts. Thank you for your continued support and prayers.

LETTER

Facing the future in our Lord’s family

To the editor:

Our days are filled with stress and fears of the unknown. Because of this, we all must walk strong and hand-in-hand together.

I live at Bethany On The Lake. The staff has made this place my home in every sense of the word. Each and every one of them has a special smile, humor, warmth and caring for each of us residents. They

fill our days with love and acts of helping us to get through each day in the absence of our families.

To the public of Alexandria, I extend my deepest appreciation and love for the flow-ers, cards and phone calls. Together, we will face the future in our Lord’s family.

My love and thanks to each of you.

Marge Darr
Resident, Bethany On The Lake
Alexandria, MN