

OPINION

AN ECHO PRESS EDITORIAL



Mayo Clinic News Network

Wear a mask voluntarily; it can save lives

For those who oppose the idea of the government “mandating” the use of masks, here’s a way to avoid it. Wear a mask voluntarily.

If more enough Minnesotans wear a mask, it can show that a mandate isn’t needed.

Because right now, Minnesota is not doing a good job when it comes to wearing masks.

A recent Goldman Sachs study Fund that Minnesota had “the lowest self-reported rate of mask usage among larger states in the U.S.”

Even if you believe some of the questionable information out there that claims masks are ineffective, what can it hurt? Yes, it’s a minor inconvenience, kind of like buckling a seat belt, but it can save lives. Credible information from health experts at the local, state, national and global level say that wearing a mask can help prevent you from infecting other people.

Minnesota Auditor Julie Blaha, a member of the governor’s executive council, cut to the point at a meeting last week: “We need everyone in Minnesota to wear a mask when they are out in public,” she said. “The science is clear: masks work.”

There is also an economic angle to consider. If not enough people are wearing masks, the virus will spread more easily, forcing restaurants and other businesses to close again. “If we want to keep businesses open and work toward reopening schools, the time is now to mask up,” Blaha said.

The Alexandria Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce is also sharing information with local businesses about masks. It sent out a letter last week noting that it’s been receiving calls from individuals regarding the lack of mask wearing in the community.

“On more than one occasion we’ve been told people don’t feel comfortable shopping locally because of the lack of masks being worn or lack of safety protocols,” said Chamber Director Tara Bitzan. “I am

not dictating that you should be requiring masks in your business, as I trust you to keep your staff and customers safe by following the necessary protocols and making your own decisions in that regard. I am simply passing this feedback on to you for your use in determining your protocols in the days and weeks to come.”

Our local public health leaders have also stressed the importance of wearing masks.

Dr. Deb Dittberner, chief medical officer for Alomere Health in Alexandria, warned the City Council last Monday about a possible spike in COVID-19 cases locally because people have become lackadaisical about wearing masks. She also talked about the economic impact – how people are not shopping or spending money at businesses that don’t require masks.

Dittberner explained that although the cloth masks that many people wear are not as effective as surgical masks, they are still worth wearing in public and can prevent virus-carrying droplets of water from the wearer’s mouth and nose infecting someone.

Horizon Public Health recently launched a “This is Serious” campaign urging people to help slow the spread of COVID-19 by following three Ws – one of which is to wear a cloth face covering if you will be around other people. (The other two Ws were to wait six feet apart and wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer.)

If we can’t trust our local health experts, who have degrees, experience and knowledge in dealing with this pandemic, who can we trust?

It’s troubling that a commonsense precautionary measure of wearing a mask has become politicized, triggering vicious arguments and name-calling. Do something more productive and potentially life saving. Wear a mask.

LETTER

Child care is the business that powers business

To the editor:

We need to prioritize child care investments in the next Coronavirus relief package. The last few months have been extremely difficult for the child care field—which is facing financial challenges and state-wide shortages. Both center-based and home-based child care providers need assistance sooner rather than later to stay open and support Minnesota’s working families, economic recovery, and COVID-19 response.

Before COVID-19, Minnesota already was in the throes of a child care crisis. With the additional strain of the pandemic, we’re at risk of losing even more providers. Shortages are especially severe in Greater Minnesota.

Like many small businesses, child care programs have suffered devastating revenue losses. At the same time, they’re experiencing increased costs due to COVID-19 mitigation

measures, such as reduced group sizes and increased sanitation and staffing needs. No doubt many industries are facing similar challenges. Child care, however, is unique in that it is the industry that allows others to work. It is essential to support child care so that essential staff are on the job, parents have support as the wider economy reopens, and children’s educations aren’t further disrupted.

The \$3.5 billion in supplemental funding the CARES Act provided to the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) was an important first step. But the industry needs more support to meet the many challenges. To stabilize the child care system amidst the pandemic, we ask that Congress provide at least \$50 billion in dedicated child care funding through CCDBG in the next Coronavirus relief package.

Nancy Jost
Director of Early Childhood, West Central Initiative
Fergus Falls, MN

Don’t let passion turn to aggression

Sometimes I feel as if Alexandria, MN has a protective bubble around it, keeping it safe from some of the ugly things happening in other communities around the state. Most recently those things include COVID hospitalizations and deaths, business closings, rioting and destruction, and significant increases in crime and mental health issues.

I find myself almost apologetic when speaking with people in other communities when I report that things are “OK” in Alexandria. Things definitely aren’t awesome, but they aren’t terrible. We are doing “OK” and in times like this, that is nothing to hang our heads about.

At the time of writing this, we have not had any COVID deaths in our community. Our local health care professionals have done a remarkable job of planning, preparing and keeping order during a time of many unknowns. That makes me feel safe.

A restaurant closed, which was a loss for our community, but many other local businesses that were fearful a couple months ago that they wouldn’t survive this are now reporting good numbers – not great, but survivable. It was incredible to watch local residents and other businesses rally around those that were struggling. That makes me proud.

We had a couple peaceful protests/rallies in response to racial injustice, which were conducted in an orderly, respectful manner, without violence or destruction. Conversations were started, and our community will only become better if those conversations continue. That gives me hope.

The past few months have been challenging



TARA BITZAN
In the Know

in many ways. Local businesses and organizations have had to reinvent their business model to stay profitable yet safe. Because one of the Chamber’s top priorities is to help our members be successful, last week we sent an email alerting them to the fact that the Chamber has been receiving calls from individuals regarding the lack of mask wearing in our community. We’ve been told people don’t feel comfortable shopping locally because of the lack of masks being worn or lack of safety protocols.

While the email was informational only, a few read it as a statement that the Chamber is promoting mask mandates and felt their rights were being violated. The Chamber is not taking a stance on the mask mandate issue. We are simply doing our best to support the success of our local business community by sharing what consumers are telling us. If we get a call from someone with complaints about a business’ customer service, cleanliness, product, facility, etc., we connect with that business and have a conversation. Again, we want our members to be successful, so we do everything we can to help solve those issues.

We viewed these complaints in the same way, and shared the feedback simply so local businesses could consider that information as they move forward with newly established protocols.

The Chamber is in the business of supporting business and commerce.

We are not medical professionals or scientists, we are not government.

I defer back to the guest editorial that appeared in the January 15 Echo Press that stated “Our community is full of passionate people, and that is why we are so successful! Passion builds momentum, gains followers and is a catalyst for making things happen. But there is a fine line between passion and aggression. Much too often that line is crossed, and that is a detriment to our entire community.”

That editorial addressed the “mean-spirited words that get carelessly thrown around when there is debate of any kind within the community,” including, “aggressive, hurtful or hateful social media posts, the spreading of incorrect information to others, and worst of all, personal attacks.”

These are scary, challenging times for everyone in the world. While there is strength in numbers and comfort in knowing everyone is in this together, it’s also easy during times like this to choose sides and to let your passion flame so strongly that you fail to listen to the other side or worse, to start judging those who don’t agree with you.

Don’t let your passion turn to aggression. Have conversations, share open dialogue, listen, take a stand if you wish and support it with “me/I” instead of “you” statements, don’t judge others and condemn them for believing differently.

It’s OK to disagree, but it’s never OK to be disrespectful or unkind.

Tara Bitzan is executive director of the Alexandria Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce. In the Know is a rotating column written by community leaders from the Douglas County area.

1970: Terrifying twister hits Miltona

1871 – 149 years ago: The Alexandria Post boasted, “Alexandria, as a summer resort, compares in its air to sunny Italy. Indeed, the whole of Douglas County seems to be intended for one grand pleasure garden.”

In 1950 – 70 years ago: The Park Region Echo ran a story about the Alexandria area, “It was this great natural beauty which prompted the first settlements in this area and it was the same great natural beauty which spawned the now-famed resort business in this area.”

1970, 50 years ago: The turbulence was there... but the dark, ominous looking clouds were missing. Regardless of what color, the twister that swooped down on the village of Miltona Saturday evening, July 18 (electric clocks stopped at 7:02 p.m.) was as terrifying and devastating to those involved as any tornado recorded anywhere. It was only about a-block-and-a-half wide and its path was only about three miles. But it couldn’t have been more of a direct hit. When the tornado dissipated back into the clouds, 11 homes, 14 businesses and several farms had been either damaged or destroyed and five people had been injured.

Osakis Fire Chief Ed Pollard announced that firemen Don Hoosline, Lawrence Benedict and Bob George picked up the Osakis department’s new John Bean Fire Truck at the company plant in Tipton, Indiana. They also attended a two-day school



RACHEL BARDUSON
Observations from the Archives

prior to driving the unit home. The school covered complete maintenance of the unit and actual fire fighting techniques with high pressure fog. The unit is equipped with a 70 GPM high pressure pump operating at 850 lbs. pressure, delivering water through two hose lines equipped with special fog guns.

1995, 25 years ago: The small town of Herman, population 485, will host its second annual “Bachelormania” featuring country music’s “The Mavericks.” Special guest, Cosmopolitan magazine’s Tracy James, will be the star bachelor. He was featured in the May issue and was its first centerfold since Burt Reynolds. Other events include a bachelor auction, bachelor banquet, the 101st Grant County Fair, the county fair parade and more.

The library is set to move to the newly remodeled Douglas County Services Center, the former Central School building. Enter off Fillmore and go right to the area down by the pool. There are two entrances on the bottom level, enter the one that says Douglas County Library.

2010, 10 years ago: The Douglas County courthouse remodeling project is moving forward. Cost of the project is

approximately \$2 million. Phase I includes a two-story addition to the south side of the courthouse wing that would include a secure area for inmate transfers to and from court, a vehicle sally port, court holding rooms, conference room/jury assembly and more. Phase I does not, however, include a new dispatch area.

A ground breaking and blessing was held for Grand Arbor, the newest lifestyle community for aging adults by Knute Nelson. At the site on Pioneer Road, Grand Arbor consists of 137 apartments encompassing independent living, assisted living, enhanced assisted living and memory care assisted living apartments.

Just for fun 1995 – 25 years ago: Since “Bachelor Fever” hit Herman in 1994, organizers say the response to their quiet rural community has continued to increase. There are now more women-owned businesses, about 60 new residents, increased school enrollment, five new businesses, an enhanced area economy and an increased interest in other rural area communities.

Sports trivia 1970 – 50 years ago: Gene Baker, Midwest scout for the Pittsburgh Pirates, held a trout camp in Alexandria. Twenty-six lads were in attendance. Two hitch-hiked from Grand Forks. They had to leave at 5 a.m. to make it by starting time.

Rachel Barduson of Alexandria is a regular contributing columnist to the Echo Press Opinion page.