



COMMUNITY VOICES AMID A PANDEMIC



Just like our world, our nation and our state, the Bemidji community has not been immune to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

Lives have been interrupted and schedules have been sidetracked. Though we know this situation is temporary, extra hand washing, social distancing and an abundance of time at home remind us that we've had to relearn how to go about our everyday lives for the time being. Though as of Tuesday afternoon there are still no reported cases of COVID-19 in Beltrami County, individuals in all fields of our community have adjusted to a national crisis. Through challenges, fears and the unknown, they cling to support, any sense of normalcy and hope.

These are their voices. *Continued on Page A6*

Pictured clockwise from top left: Mandy Frizzell, stylist; Matt Valentine, bar manager; Lisa Rother, bakery owner; Mike Gregg, plumber; Tricia Andrews, music and arts executive director; Troy Hendricks, activities director; Hugh Welle, bank president; and Christine Christiansen, educator.

Photos by Annalise Braught, Jillian Gandsey and Hannah Olson / Bemidji Pioneer



Annalise Braught / Bemidji Pioneer

BSU freshman Jennifer Hornseth, left, and Helen Mladý were two of the many students loading up their belongings on Monday outside of Oak Hall.

Seeking alternate accommodations

BSU requires students to move out of residence halls

By Annalise Braught
abraught@bemidjipioneer.com

BEMIDJI — Students at Bemidji State were thrown for another loop this past weekend when the swift decision was made to have all on-campus students move out of the residence halls.

An email was sent to

students on the evening of March 18 stating that the residence halls would remain open to ensure all students had a place to live. But things didn't stay that way for long.

Another email was sent out around 5:30 p.m. on Friday evening, March 20, informing students they had until 5 p.m. on Monday, March 23, to move out of their dorms.

"In support of national efforts to 'flatten the curve' of community transmission of the coronavirus, we need to mini-

mize the number of students living on our campus," the email said. "This leads us to take the strong action of closing our residence halls, effective at 5 p.m. on Monday, March 23. We recognize that this action creates yet another major disruption for our students and regret that it is necessary."

Andy Bartlett, executive director of communication and marketing at BSU, said that they made the quick decision based

BSU: Page A7

Tutto Bene reinvents itself in the midst of COVID-19

By Bria Barton
bbarton@bemidjipioneer.com

BEMIDJI — Just minutes after Governor Walz announced the temporary closure of restaurants and bars to dine-in customers due to the coronavirus on March 16 — leaving many food establishments scrambling for a plan of action — Tutto Bene was already at the forefront of the takeout option.

Upon unveiling a newly designed website and menu, the upscale Italian eatery made it known that it was prepared to continue catering to customers' palates with handcrafted dishes — even if those dishes now had to be boxed, bagged and sent on a car ride to somebody else's kitchen.

"Up until now, takeout had been a very, very, very small part of our business model because we're a sit-down restaurant and one of the few fine dining restaurants in town," Justin Frederick, co-owner of Tutto Bene, said. "But this is a completely different animal — and all of a sudden. So we had to ramp up certain parts of our system to be able to go solely to takeout."

Frederick, who owns Tutto Bene with his wife Jerusa, had begun planning for Gov. Walz's mandate a week prior to it.

Originally from the Twin Cities, he said his connections to chefs and restaurateurs in larger cities around the country helped him foresee the coming

changes because "we're a week behind them on what's going on — more or less as far as Minneapolis is concerned."

So when the governor finally did make the announcement, Frederick was prepared to "press the launch button" on his restaurant's temporary switch to takeout.

"I've been in this industry for two decades now," Frederick said. "I've been through 2008. I've been through 9/11. I've been through major events in our country and the world in this industry. And I've never seen a shock-wave like this. This is unprecedented. There's no script for this."

Frederick made the

TUTTO BENE: Page A7



Jillian Gandsey / Bemidji Pioneer

Justin Frederick, co-owner of Tutto Bene, puts together their gnocchi and pesto dish on Thursday, March 19, at the restaurant.



COMMUNITY VOICES AMID A PANDEMIC

Educator: 'People put their heads to the ground and worked'



Hannah Olson / Bemidji Pioneer
Christine Christiansen, Bemidji Area Schools.

About a week ago, Christine Christiansen was driving with her family and listening to the radio when she heard Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz pass the executive order shuttering schools throughout the state. She described the days following as incredibly emotional, as she found herself worrying about the well-being of her students.

"I told my husband, 'This sounds really funny, but I think I'm going to cry,' and I started to cry," she said. "I thought, 'I know that these children, no matter what, will be fed because that's just what our district will do, but what about the expectation that somebody's looking for them every day and somebody expects them to be in class' ... And I'm worried, without having some sort of accountability of them showing up every day, what's their life going to look like?"

Christine is a teacher on special assignment as a reading specialist for Bemidji Area Schools.

"Ironically, I am concerned more about the well-being of our students when they are away from us. Academically, I'm not as concerned," she said. "I know that our teachers will come through and we will provide quality distance learning. I know that our seniors will graduate and move on. And I know that our elementary students, we will have time to just pick up wherever they come in next year, and move on."

Prior to the closure, Christine often went from school to school in the district during the week, helping teachers with curriculum planning. Now, she is neck-deep in distance learning preparations.

She currently spends her time in one spot – her office at J.W. Smith Elementary – helping teachers transition to distance learning, recording herself for instructional videos, and sharing a now much quieter space with fewer than 15 children a day, those who are there for governor-mandated childcare.

Christine is impressed with the creativity and flexibility of educators who are switching to distance learning at the drop of a hat.

"People put their heads to the ground and worked on everything on their check-off list until it was done," Christine said. "And nobody said, 'Oh my hours are up, I need to go home.' Everybody really came together to get a lot done in a very, very short amount of time."

She believes this situation, while difficult and full of uncertainties, has helped people to see the immense value of schools.

"I think the whole community has seen now that schools offer so much more than academics," Christine said. "And you saw that when we canceled and everybody went to social media... and said, 'What are we going to do with 'X'Z?' because our schools are closed?"

—Hannah Olson

Activities director: 'A lot of things have changed'



Jillian Gandsay / Bemidji Pioneer
Troy Hendricks, Bemidji High School.

Troy Hendricks' daily planner isn't blank, but it might as well be.

The Bemidji High School Activities Director had a busy week scheduled, which included the annual Lumberjack Bopsiel, a three-day AD conference and coordinating practice space for the spring sports teams.

But as the school's empty classrooms, gyms and parking lots suggest, that's not the plan anymore.

"A lot of things have changed," Troy said. "For the other administration, the world's tipped them upside down to where they're changing how they do work on a daily basis. For me, it's turned upside down, but we're just at a stalemate here for as long as need be."

The coronavirus pandemic has brought the high school's routine to a screeching halt. Schools are closed until at least March 27, extracurricular activities have been postponed until at least April 6 and students are stuck in limbo while waiting for their lives to return to normal.

"I think in the next week or two, we'll get more direction," Troy said. "We'll have a better idea of what we're going to be doing in April or May. It's pretty much at a stalemate right now."

Like all others, Troy is learning how to navigate into the unknown.

"At this point, it's still so new to everyone," he said. "It feels like it's been around a while, but it's still so new."

But there's still work to be done. Troy has been attending the leadership functions that help determine the school's next steps in educating the students, even though they mostly pertain to grades and coursework. And, on the positive side, he's even got a head start on coordinating the 2020-21 sports schedules.

"Next year's fall schedules are almost done," Troy said.

"Next year's winter schedules are about 75% completed. I want to have them completed in the next month or so. That'll be ahead of schedule for Troy."

—Micah Fries

Music and Arts director: 'Taking it a day at a time'



Jillian Gandsay / Bemidji Pioneer
Tricia Andrews, Headwaters Music and Arts.

Coming up with ideas for an almost entirely hands-on business, which includes 20 music teachers and four art teachers, has been a new challenge for Tricia Andrews, executive director at Headwaters Music and the Arts.

With their doors closed, Tricia and the other music teachers are working hard during this time to keep up the music program, as it is their biggest source of income for Headwaters.

"The music program is our bit of a bright spot and biggest opportunity, so we are now transitioning lessons via Skype, Google Duo or FaceTime," Tricia said. "There's about 255 music students. Most are kids but we do have a number of adults, and about half of them are fine and comfortable but the other half have had some struggles with the technology."

Due to the outbreak, Headwaters had to cancel their Monroe Crossing concert for April 18, which is their biggest fundraiser of the year.

"With that loss of income, I don't have a way to fill that gap because most likely we will reschedule that for next April, so there's that loss of income for this year. I know there are those possibilities for online fundraisers but we don't have plans in place as of now," Tricia said.

At this time, they see no possible ways to hold their scheduled art classes but are working on coming up with solutions to possibly reschedule some of the classes.

"We are all just taking it a day at a time addressing those situations as quickly as we can," Tricia said.

—Hannah LaVigne

Plumber: 'Life throws you a curveball every now and then'



Annalise Braught / Bemidji Pioneer
Mike Gregg, Dick's Plumbing & Heating.

Mike Gregg, a third-generation Bemidji plumber, said his grandfather told him he would always have a job if he went into the business. "The world's always going to need plumbers," he told Mike.

Pipes still clog in a pandemic, but that doesn't mean it's business as usual at Mike's business, Dick's Plumbing & Heating.

"Life throws you a curveball every now and then," Mike said. "Before this thing hit, economically the country was really strong. We were turning work down. We were pretty well loaded up until the end of the year. We'll make adjustments. It's pretty quiet around here, though, and I'm not used to it."

Dick's Plumbing & Heating has 16 employees and does both contract and service work. Mike said the contract work is pretty much on hold, while he is careful about making service calls.

"We have a screening process," he said. If a homeowner calls, they ask questions about the safety of the home. "If they have a couple of quarantined people in the back bedroom, we're not going. We're not going to put on hazmat suits to go in there. The safest method is to stay away. Making the right choices until we come out of this thing."

—Dennis Doeden

Hair stylist: 'Our profession was so disrespected'



Annalise Braught / Bemidji Pioneer
Mandy Frizzell, Fringe Salon.

Though she knows it is a necessary part of helping slow the spread of the coronavirus, Mandy Frizzell was upset at how the news that she had temporarily lost her job came about last week.

Mandy is a hair stylist and independent contractor rubbing Styles By Mandy out of Fringe Salon, located in the Paul Bunyan Mall.

"When Governor Walz made that announcement saying all bars and restaurants were going to close, us in the stylist industry didn't initially feel we were a part of that," Mandy explained. "After doing some research and then getting some clarification through the Minnesota Board of Cosmetology, they told us we were a part of that order after all."

She said the biggest shock was just how little notice they had in the midst of the situation, as the news didn't come until after the order deadline had already passed.

"At that point we were like, 'Well it's now 9 o'clock at night and the bars and restaurants had closed at 5,'" Mandy said. "I had a full schedule the next day. I felt so, almost betrayed, feeling like we didn't have any notice and our profession was so disrespected. That was what bothered me the most."

She said it was not just her or her co-workers who were at a loss for what to do. Even the Board of Cosmetology was initially uncertain.

"I had stylist friends calling the board and they were like, 'We don't know, we don't

know,' and we needed to know," Mandy said. "I needed to figure out my finances and let my customers know as soon as I could."

Some people have asked her if she can work out of her home in the meantime, but she explained that stylists need special licenses in order to do that. Even then, that is also not allowed at this time.

But Mandy said even if she could, she wouldn't do it – primarily because her daughter has Type 1 diabetes, and she wouldn't want to invite people into her home and risk their family's health.

"The hard part is, I still need to make money," Mandy said. "Plus I'm literally sitting here twiddling my thumbs every day, just anxious to get back out and work."

Mandy explained that because she is self-employed, she doesn't qualify for unemployment. That means, for now, they are living strictly on her husband's income as a warehouse worker at Pepsi Nei Bottling.

"It's a struggle. We're definitely having to do a lot of cutbacks," Mandy said. "And it's scary for what the future may hold for us all long-term."

—Annalise Braught

Bar manager: 'Taking it week by week, day by day'



Jillian Gandsay / Bemidji Pioneer
Matt Valentine, Corner Bar manager.

It would have been happy hour on Monday at Corner Bar while manager Matt Valentine was seated in the Nymore establishment.

Another server was behind the bar, waiting for the phone to ring, and another seated with Matt.

"It'd be a lot busier right now," Matt said. "We'd be serving a lot."

It's been about a week since Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz shut down restaurants and bars to dine-in customers. Restaurants around Bemidji were quick to make plans to take to-go orders and make deliveries, and Corner Bar was no exception.

"It's been actually pretty steady," Matt said. "The community is showing a lot of support with to-go orders. They're keeping us busy." On Sunday, they took orders for 85 burgers.

Matt has worked at Corner Bar for five years now, and he explained that this situation has caused their staff to be reduced dramatically. They've had a cook, a bartender taking orders and also a delivery driver on staff this week.

As other states close down nonessential services, Minnesota hadn't joined in yet on Tuesday. Matt sounded hopeful for establishments reopening at 5 p.m. on Friday, but they know they're dealing with the unknown.

"Just taking it week by week, day by day," he said.

They've had to change a few things, like getting buns from Raphael's Bakery and Cafe instead of their usual. Stittsworth Meats has been able to accommodate smaller orders of beef since they don't know how much they're going to sell.

"The whole week's been really... I think busier than I thought it was going to be," Matt said. "The community's definitely been supporting us more than I thought."

—Jillian Gandsay

Baker: 'Baking helps me relax and keep busy'

Though restaurants and bars are closed down, life hasn't slowed down much for Lisa Rother, owner of Rother's Just Desserts. She's still baking from home while taking care of her family – including four young children.

"With my kids being home now full-time, and not being



Annalise Braught / Bemidji Pioneer
Lisa Rother, Rother's Just Desserts.

at the bakery most of my day, we have had to come up with a whole new schedule as a family," Lisa said. "I have to explain to them why we aren't doing things like we normally would and how to social distance."

She is trying to take advantage of being closed by using the time to deep clean her small bakery, which is located in downtown Bemidji.

Just like many of the other small businesses around town, Lisa is coming up with ways to keep her business afloat in the midst of the shut downs. She is currently working on making cookie and cupcake kits to give people some tasty activities they can do at home. She is still taking special orders over the phone, as well.

"I am very worried about what this pandemic will do to our economy, and what will happen to us small business owners around town," Lisa said. "Last year's wedding season went from June to November for me. I need those months and I'm worried if those won't get to happen." Lisa is technically considered a to-go business, but with almost no foot traffic around downtown, she feels it seems pointless for her to try and sell out of her downtown storefront.

"I've been baking bread every morning since I closed, and finally yesterday I had to start making sweets again, so I made a batch of cookies," Lisa said with a laugh. "And today when I go home I might make a pan of bars. For me, baking helps me relax and keep busy."

—Hannah LaVigne

Banker: 'Our staff has been unbelievable'



Annalise Braught / Bemidji Pioneer
Hugh Welle, First National Bank Bemidji.

At First National Bank Bemidji, it's business-as-usual at the drive-up windows, despite the unusual situation.

"We are doing everything we can in all of our offices to accomplish social distancing as recommended by the various experts," said Hugh Welle, president of First National Bank. "We have no meetings going on with our staff, it's all been by email communication."

Along with social distancing among staff inside the office, closing the branch lobbies and serving customers via drive-up windows, Hugh said the coronavirus pandemic has had other ripple effects.

"It's stressful. We have staff who have children who're students and those students are home now. So we're working to accommodate those people now," Hugh said. "We also have business customers who're directly impacted, like restaurants and hotels."

Despite the changes, though, Hugh said his staff and the community were responding well to the current crisis. "Our staff has been unbelievable. They're so committed to our organization and our customers. We have not seen any kind of major disruption, our staff realizes that our customers still need to see us and talk to us," Hugh said. "I've also been impressed with the general public, as they've seemed to be heeding the warnings and taking this seriously."

—Matthew Liedke