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Walz slowplays reopening

The Associated Press

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MINNEAPOLIS — Minnesota restaurants and bars may reopen June 1 for outdoor dining with social distancing and other safeguards, while salons can resume cutting hair at partial capacity, Gov. Tim Walz said Wednesday, draw-

ing sharp criticism from those who had hoped for faster steps to help struggling businesses. It was Walz's latest move to "turn the dial" in a gradual return to normal since the coronavirus pandemic cost hundreds of thousands of Minnesotans

their jobs within a few weeks. He said the slow pace reflects the need to prepare for the coming stresses on the health care system as COVID-19 cases peak in the coming weeks.

The governor said he empathized with "how maddening this is, how frustrating it is" for Minnesotans not to be able to do the things they enjoy. But social

distancing, hand-washing, wearing masks and getting tested when one has symptoms of COVID-19 are things that people can control, he said.

Bars, restaurants, personal care services and other nonessential businesses have been shut down since mid-March, though

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By Mark Fischenich mfishenich@mankatofreepress.com

MANKATO — In another time, it would have seemed strange to see two employees of a downtown Mankato bar and restaurant measuring the width of South Front Street.

But on Wednesday afternoon, shortly after Gov. Tim Walz announced

Restaurant, bar owners disappointed

eating and drinking establishments could reopen June 1 with outdoor seating only, business owners were brainstorming. Close South Front Street to traffic and use the driving lanes as space for dozens of tables, each placed six feet apart? Narrow the lanes to create a walkway

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TODAY'S OBITUARIES

- Rochelle Rae Langsev
• Clarice Elaine Madson
• Marian Cecelia Meyer

OPINIONS

The virus and the aircraft carrier

The USS Theodore Roosevelt is soon to return to the open sea after weeks in port, but the coronavirus outbreak on board and the chain of command disruption it lead to is far from over. — A5

LOTTERY

Wednesday's Daily 3 4-8-2

Wednesday's Power 5 4-10-15-18-24

Wednesday's Powerball 18-34-40-42-50 and 9

Wednesday's Lotto America 10-13-22-35-41 and 6

Wednesday's Northstar Cash 6-7-13-28-31

Tuesday's Mega Millions 8-19-25-36-66 and 9

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WEATHER, PAGE B10

Mild

Cloudy with high around 70 and a low in the upper 50s.



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Mankato, Minnesota

NEW HOME for Connections homeless shelter



Pat Christman

(From left) Connections Shelter co-directors Erica Koser and Collette Broady Grund prepare to sign a lease agreement Wednesday at First Presbyterian Church, as the church's pastor, Lindsay Conrad, looks on. The overnight homeless shelter will operate on the church's top floor starting this fall, after having a rotating model and then being located at another singular location over its first three seasons.

Connections partners with First Presbyterian

By Brian Arola barola@mankatofreepress.com

Connections Shelter will move into First Presbyterian Church this fall, after the shelter's directors finalized a lease agreement with the church Wednesday.

The overnight shelter rotated between partner churches for its first two seasons and then had a

singular site at Covenant Family Church between October 2019 and April.

Connections' directors hope moving to First Presbyterian's top floor will get the shelter closer to developing a year-round, overnight model.

"Our goal is to be able to provide a year-round (overnight) shelter, and we really need this intermediary step where we can ramp up

with staffing and we can ramp up our volunteer model," said Erica Koser, Connections co-director. "So this space provides that."

She and co-director Collette Broady Grund were in talks with First Presbyterian's leadership about a partnership over the last year or so. First Presbyterian Pastor Lindsay Conrad said church

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Poll: Americans fear a second wave of virus

DES MOINES, IOWA

Strong concern about a second wave of coronavirus infections is reinforcing widespread opposition among Americans to reopening public places, a new poll finds, even as many state leaders step up efforts to return to life before the pandemic.

Yet support for public health restrictions imposed to control the

virus's spread is no longer overwhelming. It has been eroded over the past month by a widening partisan divide, with Democrats more cautious and Republicans less anxious as President Donald Trump urges states to "open up our country," according to the new survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

The poll finds that 83% of Americans are at least somewhat concerned that lifting restrictions in their area will lead to additional infections, with 54% saying they are very or extremely concerned that such steps will result in a spike of COVID-19 cases.

"Oh, I'd like to get my hair and nails done. It's one of those little pleasures you take for granted," said

Kathy Bishop, a 59-year-old billing specialist in Ohio who had pneumonia two years ago. "But I'm just going to suck it up. It's not worth the risk."

Even after nine weeks spent at home, Bishop is among the solid majority of Americans who support rigorous criteria for economic reopening that goes beyond wearing masks in public places.

County has 1st virus death

The Free Press and MPR News

MANKATO — The Minnesota Department of Health reported Blue Earth County's first COVID-19 death Wednesday.

The resident was between 60-69 years old, and no other details were released.

The death is the 12th linked to COVID-19 in south-central Minnesota since the pandemic began. Previously reported deaths include five in Martin County, three in Nicollet County, two in Brown County and one in Le Sueur County.

While Minnesota had been reporting fewer deaths in recent days, the state's 29 new COVID-19 fatalities reported Wednesday marked the second-biggest jump during the pandemic. The total death toll now sits at 777.

Total newly confirmed cases increased by nine in south-central Minnesota counties, with Blue Earth County's five being the most. Nicollet, Waseca, Watonwan and Sibley counties each had one new case.

Statewide cases increased by 645. Of the 17,670 total confirmed cases, 12,227 no longer need to be isolated.

While deaths, case counts and hospitalizations are still growing, there have been signs that the state's strategy for curbing the pandemic is paying off despite the economic pain it's triggered.

Health Commissioner Jan Malcolm on Tuesday noted

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Pat Christman

First Presbyterian Pastor Lindsay Conrad hands keys to Connections Shelter Co-director Erica Koser outside the church's Hickory Street entrance Wednesday, with fellow Connections Co-director Collette Broady Grund watching. Shelter guests will enter through the Hickory Street entrance, which leads to the church's top floor. The sides finalized a lease agreement Wednesday to use the church's space for the shelter next season.

SHELTER: Ambition is for a year-long overnight shelter

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members have long been looking into ways to use the extra space in the building.

When Conrad was preparing to begin her work at the church about a year and a half ago, she remembers being encouraged to connect with Koser and Grund. The three share a passion for serving the vulnerable through community-based ministry.

First Presbyterian had a task force look into the shelter possibility. Offering a year-to-year lease was a big decision, Conrad said, and one the church decided together.

"It's our way to come to the table and serve," she said.

The shelter will use the church's top floor, which includes 14 rooms previously used for purposes ranging from Sunday school to storage to games. Koser and Grund expect as many as 35 beds for individuals and families can fit, an increase from previous seasons.

Renovations will begin in June once the lease agreement begins. The space at least needs a new bathroom and a kitchenette to serve meals.

Guests will access the shelter on the Hickory Street side of the historic church. Stairs go directly up

to the top floor, along with an elevator for anyone with physical disabilities.

The City of Mankato is set to cover renovation costs using about \$40,000 in federal community development block grant funding. Kristin Prosocki, the city's associate director of housing and economic development, said the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development allocates the funding to the city each year, with one of the purposes being to benefit low-income residents.

"We use it toward goals that are laid out to meet community needs," she said. "The expansion of shelter bed space has been a longstanding need in the community."

Although again in a new location, Connections will retain its rotating volunteer model. The shelter has 16 partner congregations on board to help volunteer, provide meals or assist shelter staff.

The directors said an announcement about staffing will be made in the near future. They also pointed out community volunteers, those not affiliated with churches, will continue to be welcome and needed.

Bethlehem Lutheran Church, where Grund is a pastor; Centenary United Methodist, where Koser

is a pastor; and Conrad's First Presbyterian are all among the partner congregations. One of the goals with the new space is to give congregations a sense of ownership by sponsoring and decorating rooms, Grund said.

Achieving a year-round, overnight emergency shelter will also require more churches and volunteers to get involved, she added. Over its first three years, the shelter was seasonally open between October and April.

"If we can get the funding, we hope to open this time without a closing date," Grund said. "That's kind of our dream."

She encouraged "creative fundraising" to support the shelter. Many nonprofits can't hold traditional fundraising events due to the COVID-19 pandemic, so raising money could have to look different than it has in the past.

The pandemic could also impact operations at the new shelter location. Guest limitations could be needed, as could a change in the shelter's communal meal set-ups.

Those questions will be answered as the shelter's fall opening approaches. With people experiencing homelessness at high risk for COVID-19, Grund said

protecting guests will be a top priority.

"We are now understanding more than ever that the people experiencing homelessness are an integrated part of this community, and ignoring them is to the peril of this community," she said.

She, Koser and Conrad all expressed excitement at the new location and partnership. Conrad handed over the keys outside the church Wednesday before the three went upstairs to sign the lease agreement in a room likely to be turned into the shelter's administrative office by this fall.

"To see where it's come through the support of the community and ways we've been able to partner, I'm just in awe of how it continued to grow," Koser said.

Follow Brian Arola @ BrianArola

WALZ: Republicans, Chamber say governor is going too slowly

Continued from Page A1

eateries have been allowed to offer take-out and delivery service. When restaurants and bars reopen, they'll have to operate with limited seating capacity and space tables 6 feet apart, Economic Development Commissioner Steve Grove said. Parties will be limited to four people, or six for families. Staff must wear masks and guests are strongly encouraged to do so, except while eating and drinking. Reservations will be required.

The state is encouraging communities to find innovative ways to provide more outdoor seating, particularly for establishments without decks or patios. Some communities have already discussed closing streets or sidewalks to provide more space.

Masks, limited seating and reservations will also be required at hair salons, barber shops, nail salons and tattoo parlors as they start reopening June 1, Grove said. Campgrounds and charter boats can also reopen with social distancing and other safety measures starting June 1, meaning they'll miss the Memorial Day weekend, one of their busiest times of the year.

But gyms, theaters, bowling alleys and churches still must wait for word on when they can start getting back to normal, the commissioner said. Businesses eventually will be allowed to let more people inside and larger outdoor gatherings will be permitted. Some outdoor entertainment will be allowed, such as movies in the parks. Pools will be allowed to open at 50% capacity at some point. Eventually,

religious services with over 10 people can move inside.

Grove was unable to say when or even if full-scale youth sports and overnight youth camps can reopen this summer.

The Democratic governor, who has drawn increasing criticism from Republicans and businesses for his cautious approach, quickly came under even more fire.

"We understand the focus on safety, and so do businesses that have protection plans in place and are ready to open," Doug Loon, president of the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, said in a statement. "The approach announced today doesn't sufficiently recognize the ability of businesses — many of them small businesses — to innovate and protect employees and customers."

Without quick action to allow more reopenings, he said, many businesses will be unable to return.

"What is the science that allows indoor salon services but restricts restaurants to outdoor seating?" Republican House Minority Leader Kurt Daudt, of Crown, asked in a statement.

"Why are churches limited to 10 people outdoors while hundreds of people can gather in the aisles of big box stores?"

The governor said the growing death toll in Minnesota and the experiences of harder-hit states like New York have weighed heavily in his decision to go slow.

"It's just so bitterly heartbreaking and frustrating to know that in eight days we'll pass 1,000 (deaths) and in another 20 days of we keep at the same pace we'll pass 1,500," he said.

VIRUS: 13 days to double cases

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that the time it now takes for case counts to double is stretching out longer — about 13 days currently — helping to make the spread of the disease more manageable.

Health officials say they're watching several key metrics to gauge if the disease is accelerating as restrictions are lowered. Among them: the number of days it takes for cases to double, the amount of daily testing, the proportion of positive tests and the level of com-

munity spread that can't be traced to specific contacts — an indication the disease might be more widespread.

The state continues to add investigators to contact those infected and work to reach others who might have had contact with them and might also be potentially infected.

While the numbers of positive tests and hot spots

for the disease are spread across sectors and regions of Minnesota, more than 80 percent of those who've died from the disease were living in long-term care, and nearly all had underlying health problems. At least 34% of Minnesotans have at least one underlying health condition, according to a study from the Kaiser Family Foundation.

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Trump dismisses studies on drug


WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump emphatically defended himself against criticism from medical experts that his announced use of a malaria drug against the coronavirus could spark wide misuse by Americans of the unproven treatment with potentially fatal side effects.

He asserted Tuesday without evidence that a study of veterans raising alarm about the drug was "false" and an "enemy statement," even as his own government warned that the drug should be administered for COVID-19 only in a hospital or research setting.

The Associated Press

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