

OPINION



PILOT EDITORIAL

Hopes running high as a new, dark phase hits

We've entered a new phase of the COVID-19 pandemic in Jackson County. And it's not a good one. We've gone from a few cases here and there each week to hundreds week after week. We've gone from reports of a handful of isolated local hospitalizations to more and more — and on a more regular basis. We've gone from being that county with a single COVID-19-related death to being one of many recording multiple fatalities. We've gone from innocence to the harsh reality of knowing — even loving — somebody who has fallen ill and suffered, was or is hospitalized or who has been lost. But even as we've entered this new, dark phase of the pandemic, we have hope a new, brighter phase is on the horizon. The first COVID-19 vaccine is expected to arrive in Jackson County next week. While it's yet to be seen if this vaccine or others to follow will prove to be the catalyst to end this pandemic and all the suffering it's wrought, it seems a step in the right direction. And here in Jackson County, it's a step we need to take as soon as possible.

In praise of community organizations — and their fundraisers

Over the weekend, I took in a pair of fundraising feeds hosted by the Jackson Lions Club and Jackson Knights of Columbus, respectively. Both fundraisers featured scrumptious food, which is always a way to please this particular columnist. An aspect of community journalism I love dearly is getting to participate in some of the events I cover. At the Knights of Columbus omelet feed, I took pictures prior to church and came back to get brunch thereafter. The Jackson Lions Chili Feed supplied supper for my father and me Friday night. While such events have been somewhat diminished by the pandemic, our local organizations have adapted their fundraising to keep people safe. While drive-through feeds may not bring the same interpersonal connections as in-person gathering, it's a safe way to enjoy a meal and, most importantly, support initiatives around the county. The Jackson Lions Chili Feed raised money for the Jackson Food Shelf, which is serving more people in recent months as working families face greater food insecurity. The Knights of Columbus raised money for residents of Jackson's Good Samaritan nursing home. Supporting the missions of organizations like these is crucial to sustaining a civically and economically healthy locality. Through their work, other institutions throughout the county can receive aid to put toward fulfilling their missions. It's clear the volunteerism of the Lions, Knights of Columbus, Kiwanis Club and others is a critical resource for many projects throughout our community. Amid a national climate of fear and consternation, it's clear there are opportunities to do good right here. We don't need to take Washington by storm to make a difference. That's not to say we should abandon national politics, but we should temper our expectations about what such engagement can do for us. So let's look to our organizations. In the spirit of Christmas, let us join and help one another where we can. After all, it is from the love of one's neighbor all social goods are built. I want to thank the members of the Jackson Lions Club and the Jackson Knights of Columbus, as well as members of every volunteer organization in Jackson County. Each helps make our community a better place. We're blessed to have you and richer because of the work you do.



JUST JOSHIN'
Joshua Schuetz

Community Transit adjusted, but never stopped

As the people of the world begin to crawl out of our COVID-19 fortresses, it feels good to know some things are still the way we remember them. Community Transit of United Community Action Partnership never stopped safely serving our communities, though what we do and how we do it got some upgrades. With COVID-19 restrictions, the need to get from place to place decreased, but people still needed essentials. Community Transit began redirecting resources to make sure people who could not get to the store could still get what they needed. We partnered with local food shelves, grocery stores and Head Start to develop systems for delivering meals and other essentials. Since then, Community Transit drivers have delivered countless meals, groceries and essential items. For those who still needed transportation, Community Transit served them through it all, and developed protocols that ensure every ride is as safe as possible. Vehicle cleaning has been prioritized to provide people the assurance of a safe ride. There have always been rigorous standards in place for vehicle cleaning and inspection at UCAP. Each shift begins and ends with the drivers methodically moving through the vehicles to check for maintenance issues and cleanliness. Those practices have been expanded to include disinfecting, especially in high-touch areas of the vehicles, multiple times throughout the day. Additionally, the state mask mandate is being followed, and provisions are being made for social distancing. The change most people will notice when they board a Community Transit vehicle is plexiglass barriers have been installed, and people are wearing masks. Striking a balance between safety and the welcoming care people expect in southwest Minnesota is important. The plexiglass barriers around the driver's seat allow drivers to interact with their passengers while still providing great protection from airborne contaminants. Masks provide additional protection. They can be provided to passengers who do not have them. People may also notice the bus is not as full as it once was. The maximum number of people allowed in each vehicle at one time has been reduced to allow people to be at least 6 feet apart during their ride. Finally, since the only direct contact many passengers have with their drivers is the exchange of fares or ride cards, we are not collecting fares on board our buses. Community Transit is currently only accepting mail-in payments. It is our hope that, in addition to being more hygienic, suspending the onboard exchange makes it possible for more people to access the transportation they need without stress in a time when finances are tight. During the suspension of onboard fares, people can send donations toward transportation to any UCAP transportation office. Donations will be used to help cover the cost of operations during this unusual time. Onboard fare collection will likely be reinstated sometime in early 2021, though a specific date is not set. UCAP continues to monitor COVID-19 and anything that affects transportation needs in the communities we serve. We will continue to adjust. Our primary goal, now and always, is to do whatever it takes to maintain and expand a viable transportation system in southwest Minnesota. (About the author: Shelly Pflaum is mobility administrator with United Community Action Partnership.)

GUEST COLUMNIST
Shelly Pflaum

LAST WEEK'S ONLINE POLL

Q: What's your typical breakfast?



Source: Jackson County Pilot Website

THIS WEEK'S ONLINE POLL

Q: Will we have a white Christmas this year?

Vote online at jacksoncountypilot.com.

EDITORIAL POLICY

The Jackson County Pilot welcomes letters to the editor. Letters must include the writer's name, as well as address and phone number for verification purposes. Letters should be brief, up to 300 words. The editor reserves the right to determine whether material submitted for publication shall be printed and the right to edit as needed. Submit letters in person at the Jackson County Pilot office, mail them to 310 Second St. in Jackson or email them to editor@livewireprinting.com. The deadline for letters is Monday noon. All submissions become the property of the Jackson County Pilot and may be published or otherwise used in any medium.

Legal, but still maybe not a good idea after all

Question: I was recently told I could not keep the trailer ball mount attached to the receiver of the vehicle when it is not actually hooked up to a trailer. Is this true?
Answer: There is not a law in Minnesota that prohibits leaving a ball hitch in the receiver when not pulling a trailer. I do recommend you remove your receiver hitch when it is not in use as it can cause injury if you or others walk into it. There is also an increase in damage to vehicles that collide with a trailer hitch as it may puncture the front grill, hood and radiator area. There are laws that prohibit obstructing the rear license plate; this includes a ball that is attached to the hitch. The law also requires the ball hitch be of sufficient strength to control and support the weight of a trailer and must be a device approved by the commissioner of public safety. The law also requires your cargo be properly secured. It is important to frequently inspect your trailer, hitch, safety chains and lights when traveling. You can avoid a ticket — and a crash — if you simply buckle up, drive at safe speeds, pay attention and always drive sober. If you have any questions concerning traffic-related laws or issues in Minnesota, send your questions to Sgt. Troy Christianson, Minnesota State Patrol, at 2900 48th St. NW; Rochester, MN 55901-5848. Or reach him at Troy.Christianson@state.mn.us.



ASK A TROOPER
Sgt. Troy Christianson

<p>U.S. Sen. Tina Smith 720 Hart Senate Office Building Washington, DC 20510 (202) 224-5641</p>	<p>U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar 425 Dirksen Senate Office Building Washington, DC 20510 (202) 224-3244</p>	<p>State Sen. Julie Rosen 95 University Ave. W. Minnesota Senate Bldg, Room 2113 St. Paul, MN 55155 (651) 296-5713 sen.julie.rosen@senate.mn</p>	<p>State Rep. Rod Hamilton 337 State Office Building St. Paul, MN 55155 (651) 296-5373 or (800) 735-2463 rep.rod.hamilton@house.mn</p>
<p>U.S. Rep. Jim Hagedorn 325 Cannon House Office Building Washington, DC 20515 (202) 225-2472</p>	<p>State Sen. Bill Weber 95 University Ave. W. Minnesota Senate Bldg, Room 2109 St. Paul, MN 55155 (651) 296-5650 sen.bill.weber@senate.mn</p>	<p>State Rep. Bob Gunther 277 State Office Building St. Paul, MN 55155 651-296-3240 or 800-684-4598 rep.bob.gunther@house.mn</p>	

CONTACT YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

<p>JACKSON COUNTY PILOT 310 Second Street • Jackson, MN (507) 847-3771 • jacksoncountypilot.com Published Weekly on Thursday USPS 271880 Periodicals postage paid at Jackson, Minnesota</p>	<p>— OPINIONS — The Jackson County Pilot welcomes letters to the editor. Letters must include the writer's name, as well as address and phone number for verification purposes. Letters should be brief, up to 300 words. The editor reserves the right to determine whether material submitted for publication shall be printed and the right to edit as needed. Submit letters in person at the Jackson County Pilot office, mail them to 310 Second St. in Jackson or email them to editor@livewireprinting.com. The deadline for letters is Monday noon. All submissions become the property of the Jackson County Pilot and may be published or otherwise used in any medium.</p>	<p>— PILOT STAFF — Justin R. Lessman justin@livewireprinting.com Publisher Dan Condon danc@livewireprinting.com Sports Editor Mike Jordan mike@livewireprinting.com Staff Writer Joshua Schuetz joshuas@livewireprinting.com Staff Writer</p>
<p>Printed on Recycled Paper Read and Recycle</p>	<p>— LIABILITY — The publisher shall not be liable for slight changes or typographical errors that do not lessen the value of an advertisement. The publisher's liability for other errors or omissions in connection with an advertisement is strictly limited to publication of the advertisement in any subsequent issue or the refund of any monies paid for the advertisement.</p>	<p>Member of Minnesota Newspaper Association Postmaster: Send address changes to: Jackson County Pilot, P.O. Box 208, Jackson, MN 56143, Phone (507) 847-3771</p>