

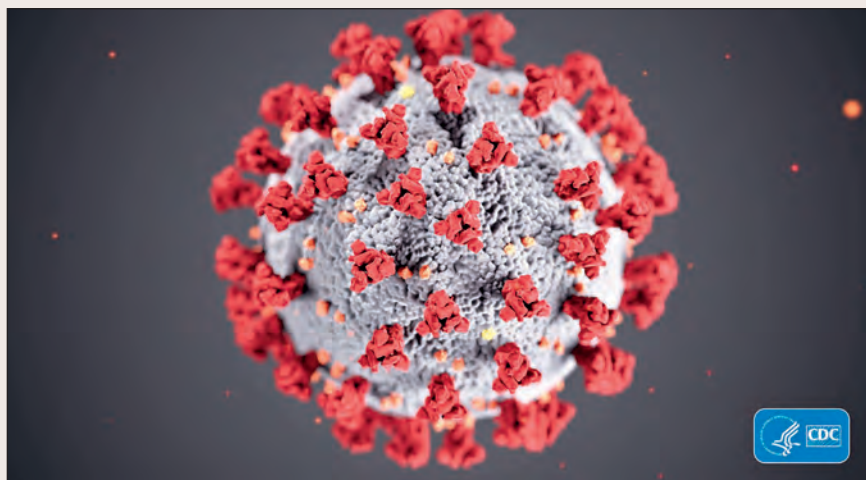
LOOKING BACK

OUR TIME with COVID

This will be written in history books

BY RACHEL FERGUS
Staff Writer

It can be hard to remember a world before COVID-19. Only two years ago, companies like Pfizer and Moderna were not household names. Back then, a face mask would receive stares of confusion, remote working was not the norm and there was a lot less sourdough bread. Now, well, we've gone through 740 days of a global pandemic and counting. Feel exhausted? You're not alone. So much has happened since March 2020 that it's hard to remember what happened and when. So, here is a very brief (mostly local) overview of the event that will be taught in schools for generations to come.



This illustration, created at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, shows the spikes that adorn the outer surface of the virus, which create the look of a corona surrounding the virion when viewed with a microscope.

The first case

Goodhue County's first reported case of COVID-19 was discovered on Tuesday, March 24, 2020. The

individual was a resident in their 20s who was exposed to a known case while they were out of state. After receiving news of the

positive test, Nina Arneson, Goodhue County's Health and Human services director, sent out a news release.

"This is Goodhue County's first lab confirmed case," she wrote. "Due to limited testing ability, the health experts in Minnesota believe these numbers are much higher."

Arneson added, "Please if you can, stay home and continue to practice community strategies to stop the spread."

The next day, Gov. Tim Walz announced the Stay at Home order for the state of Minnesota.

The first death

The county sent out a release on May 21, 2020, reporting the first COVID-19 related death locally. The individual was in their 80s.

"Our deepest sympathies go out to the family and friends of this patient

See COVID Page C7

BUSINESSES



Home Plate Grill & the Dugout Lounge offers bar and table seating.

Submitted photo

'THE PANDEMIC actually HELPED'

Owners of new businesses overcame challenges

BY SARAH KNIEFF
Staff Writer

Throughout the pandemic, small businesses have faced staffing shortages, increased prices and delayed product development.

With all these challenges, one would think starting a new company during 2020-2022 is out of the question. However, Red Wing has shown that through hard work and local support, entrepreneurs can accomplish anything.

Businesses like Home Plate Grill & the Dugout Lounge, The Market Home + Design and 210 Plum Crazy, opened within the past two years with great success.

The Republican Eagle spoke with the owners of each business to discuss how the pandemic challenged them, what hurdles they faced and what they contributed to their success.

Home Plate Grill & the Dugout Lounge

Donald Travis Foster — a classical and studio clarinetist — opened Home Plate Grill & the Dugout Lounge on June 12, 2021, to elevate the



Foster



Home Plate Grill & the Dugout Lounge.

Submitted photo

cuisine of a typical sports bar.

As he says, "just because you are watching the Twins does not automatically mean you need to go to the cardiologist after dinner. Bar food doesn't have to be junk food."

The extensive menu includes burgers, salads, sandwiches, chicken wings, fries, hummus, cheesecakes, shrimp, pork chops and more.

As the business comes up on its one-year anniversary, Foster said its accomplishments are due to incredible staff members.

How did COVID-19 affect your business opening?

I purchased the building

in December 2020. We didn't actually open to the public until June 2021. The pandemic gave us a chance to remodel, hire the staff, develop our concept, develop our menu, establish business with local and national vendors, apply for all necessary licenses, etc. So, in a strange way, the pandemic actually "helped" us because it bought us time to make sure that when we actually opened, we did so with a fully compliant and "well-oiled machine."

What challenges did you face before opening?

We really didn't have any unique challenges due specifically to the pandemic because once we decided on an opening date, most of the

The details

Location: 227 Bush St., Red Wing
Hours: Tuesday-Wednesday, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m., Thursday until 11 p.m., Friday-Saturday until midnight and Sunday until 9 p.m.
Phone: 651-327-2749
Website: homeplate-dugout.com

strictest pandemic measures had been lifted.

You had a successful opening and first year. What do you contribute to this?

Indeed, we will be celebrating our one-year anniversary in June. And, yes, we have been successful. I am delighted to share that the reason this is so, is because of the fact that we have stuck to

our business model.

We wanted to set out to open an elevated sports bar and restaurant that catered to many different taste palates but also recognize the need for a "one-stop-shop" for mingling sports viewing, leisure activities and exciting food that you can't really find anywhere else in Red Wing while enjoying these

other pastimes.

However, none of this would have been possible, and will never be possible, without a dedicated staff, stellar managers, exceptional chefs and cooks, and frankly, a proprietor who cares not just about the bottom line but genuinely cares about the health and welfare of the employees.

I live in Los Angeles full-time, so the heavy lifting is done by my general manager Kevin Braa, our assistant general manager Erin Maes and our operations manager Dawn Pfeifer.

What has increased in price for your business? How are you handling this?

Virtually every aspect of food and beverage distribution has increased in terms of what it costs us to purchase. There have been shortages of items that were at one point, easily attained [such as name brand liquor and lettuce.] We handle this by getting creative with our menu items. We have never raised prices on existing items. We only ever re-price something when it hits our menu for the first time.

What challenges are you currently facing?

Money is always a challenge. Anyone who runs an independent restaurant in a smaller town who doesn't admit that

See Challenges Page C6

YMCA

BUILDING UP the Y

3-year plan to return to pre-pandemic levels

BY SARAH KNIEFF

Staff Writer

RED WING

Bryan Soper started as the YMCA's new executive director on Oct. 1, 2021, bringing 30 years of nonprofit experience to help ease pandemic-related challenges.

"I worked in the non-profit world for most of my career," Soper said in 2021. "I was serving at the YMCA

Soper

of Middle Tennessee as operations executive director before this."

As the Red Wing CEO, Soper is responsible for bettering the YMCA and upholding its core values of caring, honesty, respect and responsibility for all. Right now, he is focusing on combating decreased membership by reintroducing classes and operation hours that were cut back during the height of the pandemic.

The Republican Eagle

Our role as a YMCA is to offer programs for youth development, healthy living and social responsibility.

Bryan Soper

Soper spoke with about how the Y is dealing with COVID-19 issues, his goals and more.

How have you been liking the position?

Red Wing has been great. My family and I have found a home in town and recently moved in. It is great to have a Y with the community support that we have. The transition to the position has been very smooth. I have great volunteer board members and some longtime staff who have made the process easier to navigate. I have been in Y work for over 30 years because I love the work we do in our YMCA communities. We have

great members in Red Wing, and it has been great getting to know them. Our members have been very gracious and understanding of our leadership transitions this past year and rebuilding process.

What goals and initiatives have you been working on to improve the Y?

Our main focus areas have been on the benefits of membership, Camp Pepin and facility needs. We have been focused on our membership experience as we bring back our offerings. Having open swim available every night, the guarantee of open gym and free child watch are a few of the



Submitted photos

Local YMCA swim instructor and students.

ways we are keeping our focus on the member experience. As we recover from the COVID-19 closures we have been growing our group class offerings back with the recent return of Zumba. We also have facility needs that come with an aging building.

What challenges have you faced and how have you overcome them?

COVID was a hard hit to every Y. Bringing back

our member benefits is our first challenge. We have consistent pool hours back, we now have over 30 free group exercise classes a week for members and we now have free Child Watch for our family memberships. Now families with memberships can drop off kids from ages 1-8 while they use the Y for free. With a decrease in membership we have looked to more funding sources for our Y through our annual campaign, local funding, grants and expanded programs.

Membership revenue has decreased. How are you combating this?

We did have a decrease in membership due to the closures. One of our brightest spots right now is our aquatics programming. Our aquatics team has been doing a great job delivering our swim lesson and drowning prevention programs. We are on track to deliver over 1,700 swim lessons this year. Staffing is the main way we have reduced expenses. Occupancy of our building is a fairly static expense as most stay the same regardless of foot traffic, a large aquatics center, four level facility and a resident camp. We have fantastic childcare and preschool programs, but they all come with fixed expenses as they should to maintain program quality. We are running the rest of our operation with about 300 less staffing hours a week from two years ago as it is one of the controllable expenses we have.

Is the YMCA back to pre-pandemic memberships and operation?

We will have a long build back to those numbers. No one has been through this before, but we expect this to be at least a three-year process. Last June membership had dipped to about 54% of our pre-pandemic numbers. We finished March at 64%. We continue to get more members coming back and new community members coming in for the first time. It has been great to see the growth in membership and have the energy back in the building. The volleyball leagues returned, pickleball is

happening five days a week, and summer camp already has 270 camper weeks registered.

We have been slowly bringing back building hours as traffic has been picking up. We had almost 10,000 visits in March. We will continue to bring more group exercise classes to our members as we increase usage. We owe it to the long-term sustainability of our Y to be good stewards of our resources and that makes it more important than ever for us to prioritize our added services by those with the largest impact.

How are you enticing people to get a membership or stay at the Y?

We will be releasing a survey this month to see what our members and former members would like to see in our Y. We want to use this to help prioritize what we add for our members. Our current members will always be our best drivers for new members. We have some of the lowest membership rates in the country for YMCA's. We always want to remind people about our scholarship programs as well. If finances are a barrier to getting a Y membership so you can access our programs, please stop in or download a scholarship application off our website. We give over \$230,000 a year in scholarships and membership subsidies so individuals can participate in the Y and our programs.

As we go into spring and summer, what goals do you have?

Our role as a YMCA is to offer programs for youth development, healthy living and social responsibility. If we are offering healthy living programs that fight chronic disease, youth programs that develop great kids and socially responsible programs like swim lessons to prevent drownings, we will have membership growth. We would love to be back to pre-pandemic levels, and we will get there if we do the programs Red Wing needs.

Readers can reach Sarah Knieff at sknieff@orourcemediagroup.com.



Preschool students having fun at the Y.

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RESTAURANTS



Rick Anderson from Kelly's Tap House Bar and Grill.

Melissa Thorud/Republican Eagle

PANDEMIC changes RESTAURANT OPERATIONS

BY MELISSA THORUD
Staff Writer

The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting lockdowns created challenges for restaurants to overcome. Local Red Wing restaurants found new ways to reach the community and support their employees during lockdowns.

Many of the changes that helped the restaurants survive the pandemic have been incorporated into their ongoing business model.

Kelly's Tap House Bar and Grill began offering a deli-style shop for take-out meals. They added an addition to where their outdoor patio normally would be.

The addition added walls, carpet and heating. The new area provided for more social distancing as well as their deli counter and to-go ordering space. The restaurant owners needed to work with city building officials to make this happen.

Kelly's Rick Anderson, part of the family-owned management, said, "The city granted us permission to put sides up and windows in it and then

carpet with heat and that is how we were able to social distance."

Anderson added, "When it was lockdown we set up a sub counter in here and then we had a deli in here and a few display cases, everything we sell here is made from scratch, so we just made all of that available to customers."

Aside from the deli and an assembly-line style ordering model, Kelly's started using online ordering, curbside pickup and continued social distancing inside the restaurant. Now that most COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted, Kelly's continues to offer some of these services.

Curbside pickup and online ordering have stayed as part of the company's operations as well. Adding these services has been beneficial to the restaurant and allows them to appeal to more customers.

"We still use curbside and online ordering," Anderson said. "We have found that a lot of people really like being able to use that, and it helps us to appeal to people who both want to come in and



File photo

Outdoor seating helped Mandy's provide social distancing.

dine in as well as people who still prefer takeout."

The challenges that restaurants faced during the lockdowns hurt the business and their workers at the time. It was difficult for the employees to work enough hours at the beginning of the pandemic, but once they became more acclimated to the changes, business picked up again.

"Something that really helped during the lockdown was, a lot of local

businesses would order meals for their employees to-go and that helped us out a bit, too," Anderson said.

In downtown, local coffeehouse Mandy's found themselves forced to make changes because of the pandemic. At the beginning of the first lockdown, Mandy's completely closed for five weeks, reopening in April.

The only sales made were coffee bean sales

during those weeks.

"To keep connections during the time we were closed, I would just do some coffee bean sales," owner Mandy Cardinal said. "People would come pick them up curbside style, but that's all we were able to do."

The coffee shop reopened in April 2020 and made changes to how they served customers. They began offering curbside and to-go orders.

"I had planned to get online ordering set up prior to the pandemic, so that was the last push to actually get it going, and we still offer that now," Cardinal said.

After being closed for five weeks and reopening with only to-go options, the restaurant made some changes to their menus. Mandy's consolidated their menu items in order to reduce waste and curb product shortages.

"We made our soup sizes larger so that they made sense for to-go, and we just consolidated a lot of our menu items, and we have tended to keep it that way after restrictions and mandates were lifted," Cardinal said.

Once dine-in was allowed, Mandy's continued to social distance in their cafe space, but business picked up quickly.

"Even though it was still kind of the height of the pandemic there would be times when the cafe was completely full," Cardinal said. "There were times that it was busier than it was pre-pandemic because people were looking for things to do."

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Bunny Moore
Allie Moosbrugger
Martin Morales Soto

Tara Moses
Jaimie Murphy
Lori Myers
Hailey Nadeau
Cindy Nelson
Austin Neu
Nathan Noerenberg
Nathan Noll
Wil Noll
Michelle Osborn
Stacy Owens
Amy Peck
Aracely Peralta
Mijangos
Omar Perez Ramirez
Alyssa Peterson
Julien Peterson
Renee Peterson
Carrie Poncelet
Darrell Potts
Katie Prytz
Yvette Quist
Rung Rapp
Konda Reddy
Brad Reiter
Marcos Reyna
Dave Riegelman
Ryan Risberg
Kelly Roan
Maria Rodriguez
Melisa Rodriguez

Regeena Roemer
Teresa Rojas
Molly Rollwagen
Sasha Rose
Trace Roshell
Brian Ross
Ciara Rossi
Dan Roth
Angel Rowan Thomas
Haley Rupe
April Ryan
Adrian Sanchez
Figueroa
Danielle Sanders
Joshua Sanders
Jessica Sandrin
Rhonda Sanford
Kacie Schimmel-Klym
Angie Schively
Dave Schlangen
Jackie Schletty
Tony Schmidt
Jerry Schmidt
Sandy Sears
Karthik Sembur
Viswanathan
Aaron Seymour-Anderson
Troy Thompson
Troy Shell
Mike Shore
Donnelle Simmons
Jenn Skerbins
Ed Skoviak
Abe Smith

Jenna Smith
Kori Smith
Jarrett Sommerfield
Maggie Sommers
Tim Sorenson
Gracie Spriggle
Ian Steaton
Stacie Stechmann
Curtis Skerston
Genna Strauss
LaFrance
Autumn Stuhmann
Bobbi Suchla
Eric Sullmann
Mikayla Sullivan
Sri Suryadevara
Claudia Sviderski
Chelsea Swaggert
Mike Swenson
Sandra Swenson
Steven Swenson
Hillary Theis
Jenna Thom
Will Thomas Jr
Brian Thomas
Troy Thompson
Elle Thygesen
Scott Tisland
Hilary Tollefson
Karen Triviski
Amy Univer
Candie Unser

Kim Vander Laan
Zongchou Vang
Ricardo Vargas Mejia
Gabe Vargas
Shelley Veek
Cherri Vester
Emily Vigil
Bruce VonBargen
Destiney Voss
Sherry Voth
Randii Waddell
Cory Wagner
Jade Walber
Mimi Walker
Jessica Walsh
Katie Wang
Joel Watson
Michael Weatherford
Bailey Wedrickas
Ryan Welch
James Wenger
Benjamin Wentzler
Bryce Wernsman
Diana Willis
Zach Wilson
Steve Wolfe
Titus Wolff
Michelle Wyatt
Peter Xiong
Tami Zwirtz

CHALLENGES PAGE C1

is simply telling a falsehood. However, I am truly never “worried” about the money side of things. Staffing size is adequate as of now, but it is no surprise that staff shortages are everywhere, and we are also feeling that.

What are your future plans?

I can't reveal all of our secrets, but I can tell you that there are some major announcements coming down the pipe. We are looking to beautify and expand our outdoor space. Expansion of our live music, karaoke, trivia and game show nights are also on the horizon.

The Market Home + Design

Jodi Caverly opened her store – The Market Home + Design – on Oct. 28, 2020, offering in-home design consultations, custom furniture and delivery.

After 18 months of business, Caverly contributes her success to the continued support of her customers and community.

How did COVID-19 affect your business opening?

The main thing that was affected by the pandemic was that I was not able to bring on some brands or get as much inventory as I had hoped for right away when opening. Many manufacturers were limiting what and who they sold to, and a new account was the last person to receive anything or get any attention. I stayed persistent and eventually was able to open up accounts with all the manufacturers that I wanted to. Nearly a year and a half after opening, I am just in the final stages of opening with one of my favorite brands. Look for a fresh new line of upholstery coming soon.

What challenges did you face before opening?

Just so many unknowns and uncertainties. I made the decision to open The Market Home + Design in the late spring of 2020, right after the pandemic started. At that time, most of the reps I talked to were helpful and hopeful that by the fall, when I would actually be opening the doors to the store, availability and production times would be back on track. As we inched closer to opening the furniture and home decor industry was getting worse and worse as far as availability went. We really have just taken everything day by day since opening. It's the only way to stay upbeat and positive.

You had a successful opening and first year and a half. What do you contribute to this?

New and old relationships with customers. Absolutely, hands down, the customers. I owe much of the success to them. I have been shown so much support over the last year and half it just amazes me. I'm hopeful that will continue and in return The Market will continue to thrive.

What has increased in price for your business? How are you handling this?

Everything has increased in price. We are receiving price increases and surcharges from all of our manufacturers more often than we like. Unfortunately, we do have to implement the increases within our store on the goods we sell.

What challenges are you currently facing?

We are still being faced with the delay in receiving products, especially the custom items, which is the main focus at The Market. We are starting to see some custom order times improve which gives up hope that we will at some point “get back



Jodi Caverly and family.

Submitted photos

The details

Location: 816 Main St., Red Wing

Hours: Monday-Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Phone: (651)-327-2870

Website: themarkethomedesign.com

to normal.”

What are your future plans?

In the future I plan to keep offering quality home furnishings and customer service to our community. We hope to keep growing our interior design business which we all feel is one of the best parts of The Market Home + Design. No major changes are planned, we hope to just keep growing and evolving as needed.

210 Plum Crazy

What do you get when five passionate women



Caverly picks out furniture samples to show a customer.

decide to start a business during the pandemic? The result is 210 Plum Crazy; a fun, eclectic and enticing store that offers just a bit of everything.

Owners – Amy Hovland, Becca, Jodee Glenna, Suzie Spain and Tami Hicks – originally opened the store under the name 203 Plum Crazy on Oct. 16, 2020,

at 203 Plum St. However, after location complications, the store was renamed 210 Plum Crazy and during March 2022, moved to 210 Bush St.

As the owners settle into their new space, they are grateful for the constant support from other local businesses.

How did COVID-19 affect

your business opening?

We were very concerned that retail would face a second shutdown and we wouldn't be able to open our doors or be required to close once we were operational. We were “crazy” enough to forge ahead even though most people were shopping online. Because of the pandemic, in our business plan we needed to be extremely cautious in start-up costs which meant that we hand wrote receipts and used a cash register to total each sale.



From left: Owners Jodee Glenna, Suzie Spain, Tami Hicks, Amy Hovland and Becca Spain.

Submitted photo

The details

Location: 210 Bush St., Red Wing

Hours: Tuesday-Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Email: 203plumcrazy@gmail.com

Website: <https://www.facebook.com/210-Plum-Crazy-109804397518216/>



An inside look of 210 Plum Crazy.

What challenges did you face before opening?

Our store and the businesses on either side of us were freshly painted. A weathered awning was also replaced with one that complemented the new paint colors. In addition, we chose a location with lower rent which in the past did not fare well with previous attempts at retail. It fit the budget considering the pandemic and knew that we needed to be diligent in marketing strategies to encourage people to walk to our store which was off the beaten track.

You had a successful opening and first year. What do you contribute to this?

We owe much of our success from the support of other local businesses in those first two years. While we did grow a loyal customer base, much of our tourist traffic was from word-of-mouth from other retail stores. We tremendously value them, our Red Wing partners, and the unwavering support of our community. Without them, there would be no us.

What has increased in price for your business? How are you handling this?

Nearly everything has gone up in price. Cost of goods continue to go up, shipping has nearly doubled, and some vendors add surge fees to offset their increased expenses. While these fees make it very challenging, we do our best to buy in bulk quantities, order when there are promotions and scout the very best prices so we don't have to pass these costs on to our customers. So often customers tell us “your prices are so reasonable,” and we are doing our very best to keep it that way in this very difficult climate.

What challenges are you currently facing?

For continued growth and success, it was imperative we moved our location. While our first space gave us our start, we were, unfortunately, off the beaten path. We made the move into a highly challenging space that had been disregarded by many others. Just to open the doors required a lot of work and resources – scrubbing years of grease and grime from all surfaces, updating lighting, adding electrical and painting. Having startup costs for a second location in under two years has been extremely challenging. In addition to our startup expenses, we had been manually writing sales receipts. When we moved our location to Bush Street, we converted to a POS system to deliver a better, more efficient customer experience. While this change was necessary, it was a costly undertaking.

What are your future plans?

Our top priority is to continue to enhance the historical charm and character of Red Wing by revitalizing our space. Exterior paint or additional signage is badly needed after the removal of the gigantic submarine sandwich from the previous tenants of two years ago. Outdated ceiling fans should be replaced with lighting better suited for retail. We also plan on building a website for further visibility. We value the importance of marketing via social and print media. This allows us to grow and become a retail destination for locals and tourists. All types of media can be expensive, and we look forward to increasing our marketing budget.

Readers can reach Sarah Knieff at sknieff@rourekemediagroup.com.



File photo

When public schools returned to in-person learning, mask mandates were in place.

COVID PAGE C1

during this time of loss,” County Board Commissioner Paul Drotos stated in the release. “This loss is deeply felt by our entire community. As COVID-19 continues to spread in Goodhue County and Minnesota, each of us must continue to do our part to prevent the spread of this virus, especially to our most vulnerable Minnesotans.”

At the time of the May 21 release, the county had confirmed 40 cases of COVID-19.

Timeline

This list of events related to COVID-19 is from the CDC and Minnesota Public Radio.

2020

March 6: The first COVID-19 case in Minnesota is reported.

March 11: COVID-19 is declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization.

March 13: President Donald Trump declares a nationwide emergency because of COVID-19.

Walz declares a peacetime emergency.

March 15: States begin shutting down to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The temporary closure of Minnesota K-12 public schools is announced.

March 19: The first COVID-19 related death in Minnesota is reported. The individual was a Ramsey County resident in their 80s.

March 25: Minnesota’s Stay at Home order is announced.

March 26: The U.S. Senate passes the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act. The act provides \$2 trillion in aid to hospitals, small businesses and state and local governments.

April 3: The CDC recommends all people wear a mask when outside of the home.

April 7: A state-wide masking order is unveiled.

Dec. 11: FDA issues an Emergency Use Authorization for the first COVID-19 vaccine.

Dec. 14: New York Nurse Sandra Lindsay is the first American outside a clinical trial to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. The first vac-



Bob Burrows/Star-Observer

Parking lot COVID-19 testing sites became common in 2020.



File photo

The first COVID-19 vaccines arrived in Minnesota on Dec. 14, 2020.

cines arrive in Minnesota **2021**

Jan. 18: U.S COVID-19 deaths surpass 400,000. Minnesota elementary schools begin to restart in-person classes

Jan. 26: Worldwide COVID-19 cases surpass 100 million.

Feb. 21: U.S. COVID-19 deaths surpasses 500,000.

March 22: No COVID-19 related deaths are

reported in Minnesota for the first time in almost a year.

June 1: The Delta variant becomes the dominant variant in the U.S.

Local data

The New York Times collects COVID-19 related data in municipalities throughout the United States. Goodhue County data shows:

▶ The highest daily average of new cases was

149 cases. This was on Jan. 25, 2022.

▶ From the beginning of the pandemic through Sept. 26, 2020, there were nine or fewer new cases of COVID-19 reported. On Sept. 27, 11 new cases were reported.

▶ The first spike of COVID-19 cases in the county started in mid-October 2020. On Nov. 20, there were 78 new cases reported.

▶ In June and July 2021, the highest number

of daily cases reported was 10.

Goodhue County keeps records of local COVID-19 cases and vaccines. As of March 10, 2022, the county reported:

▶ Cumulative number of cases in the county: 12,883.

▶ Cumulative number of deaths in the county: 126.

▶ Cumulative number of cases in the county that required hospitalization: 482.

▶ People with at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine: 31,215 (71.5% of the population).

▶ People with completed vaccine series: 29,830 (68.4% of the population).

Community response

On Thursday, March 19, 2020, the Red Wing City Council held a special meeting to discuss the recently declared pandemic. Council members and city staff spread out in the council chamber as Council Administrator Kay Kuhlmann explained what the city could and should do moving forward.

“I just want everybody to know we are taking this very seriously,” Kuhlmann said. “And that the situation’s evolving. So, what you hear now, will probably change tomorrow.”

Government bodies at every level usually discuss worst-case scenarios in order to be prepared for them.

“If this does go on for months and months, we cannot delay all of our board and commission work,” Kuhlmann said.

For this reason, the council decided to transition all city meetings to a virtual platform.

Worst-case scenario thinking resulted in helpful plans, including deciding that utilities would not be shut off because of an inability to pay.

Goodhue County closed all of its buildings and offices to the public on that Thursday.

Then County Board Chair Paul Drotos attended the special City Council meeting.

He told those gathered, “It is amazing to me how fast our vocabulary is changing in response to the COVID-19 problem. Words like ‘social distancing,’ ‘respiratory etiquette,’ and ‘cycle of transmission’ are changing the way we talk and act.”

Drotos added, “A hero used to be someone who went out to fight the bad guys. Today, it is someone who understands what is at stake and stays at home if they can to contain the infection.”

Readers can reach Rachel Fergus at rfergus@orourkemediagroup.com

RED WING PUBLIC SCHOOLS

COVID-19 causes LEARNING LOSS

District to focus on teaching

BY SARAH KNIEFF
Staff Writer

The pandemic has affected everyone differently. For K-12 students, the last few years have been a rollercoaster of change, learning loss and educators trying their best to help.

Starting in 2019, schools around the country were debating shutdowns as the first wave of COVID-19 came to the United States.

Locally, Red Wing Public Schools created a contingency plan and was able to begin providing all students with Chromebooks for its inevitable closure.

"The district did go full distance for all grades around Thanksgiving 2020," said Jess Whitcomb, director of teaching and learning.

Red Wing administrators were concerned about their students' ability to learn while distant, but safety came first.

As countrywide COVID numbers declined, staff made the decision to have a staggered in-person return during late January 2021.

"By the end of April, we returned to full in-person learning, five days a week for all grades," Whitcomb said. Unfortunately, this didn't last long.

Cases began to rise again, and high school students started a system with two days virtual learning and two days in-person, continuing for most of 2020-2021.

"We were lucky enough to be one of the few schools to be able to keep our elementary students in-person during most of the pandemic,"



Aerie photo

2021: Seniors are back in-person for Language Arts at Red Wing High School.

Whitcomb said.

The district was able to do this because they reopened vacant Jefferson School for more room to socially distance. Jefferson has since closed again as the need is no longer there.

During the 2021-2022 school year, all students have been in-person everyday. Masks were required until this past February and are now only recommended.

"As the CDC research found – and our experience also showed – districts like ours that had mask mandates had 25% fewer COVID-related absences than those that did not," Superintendent Karsten Anderson said. "Masks became optional/recommended here just short of two years after Minnesota had its first case."

"I am confident Red Wing Public Schools made and continues to make wise decisions to provide our students with optimal, safe learning environments given conditions."

Learning loss

With all the changes throughout 2019-2022, an impact on K-12 students' learning abilities was inevitable.

Local and statewide MCA scores dropped significantly in 2021 when compared to 2019 – there was no testing in 2020 due to COVID-19.

Results:

Reading: 44% of students taking the exam scored at an "exceeds standards" or "meets standards" level.

In 2019, the result was

55%, which shows a 11% point decrease. Statewide scores had a 6% point drop.

Math: 36% of students taking the exam scored at a "exceeds standards" or "meets standards" level.

In 2019, the result was 49%, which shows a 13% point decrease. Statewide scores had the same percentage point drop.

Science: 33% of students taking the exam scored at a "exceeds standards" or "meets standards" level.

In 2019, the result was 51%, which shows a 18% point decrease. Statewide scores had an 8% point drop.

When the scores were released, School Board members and Anderson discussed why the results dropped and most believed this was

due to COVID-19.

Current goal

At the time, Anderson said the goal was to get the numbers back up, while focusing on student learning first. This goal still stands today.

"Grades will ebb and flow depending on where student learning is at any given point in a semester," Whitcomb said. "If all students came in with 100% of the knowledge, we wouldn't need to teach. Learning is happening every day in Red Wing Public Schools ..."

The district's strategy for learning improvement is to teach its core curriculum at a high level of rigor along with quality support for students who need a little extra help.

District programs

Title I: A federally funded program that provides support to students who are performing below grade average in reading and math.

Alternative Delivery of Specialized Instructional Services (ADSIS): provides "instruction to assist students who need additional academic or behavioral support to succeed in the general education environment," according to the Minnesota Department of Education.

Instructional coaching: mentors who work with teachers to increase the quality of their lesson and student education.

"We have programs such as Title I, ADSIS, Instructional Coaching, REACH classes, after school tutoring, community organizations, counseling and social workers," Whitcomb said. "All of these and more are strategies we are always doing as a school district to meet our students' needs."

2022 MCA scores have not been released yet, but no matter the results, Red Wing schools will continue to put an emphasis on teaching and not statistics.

"Although grades help us measure learning, our focus [will] always be on learning versus grades," Whitcomb said.

Readers can reach Sarah Knieff at sknieff@ourkemediagroup.com.

HEALTH CARE

LABOR SHORTAGE persists at LONG-TERM FACILITIES

BY RACHEL FERGUS
Staff Writer

Health care facilities were hit hard during the pandemic.

Remember the designated times to cheer for healthcare workers? The photos of crying nurses and doctors with red indents on their cheeks from wearing masks for over 12 hours? The heart-wrenching stories of hospital workers social distancing from their spouses and children at home to try and keep them healthy?

Now more than two years into the global pandemic, there is light at the proverbial end of the tunnel. However, this doesn't mean that health care facilities are back to what was normal before March 2020. This is especially true for long-term care.

Facilities that care for elder members of society and home health care organizations struggled with a labor shortage throughout the pandemic. While the pandemic is lifting, the labor shortage remains.

There are numerous reasons for labor short-

ages in long-term care, but one that comes up again and again is burnout.

"When you work in a facility and you're providing somebody 24/7 care, it's not like you can just, you know, punch out at the end of the shift," registered nurse Rob LaPorte said. "You have to make sure that there's somebody there."

LaPorte currently works with Goodhue County residents 65 and older to find them needed services. LaPorte is the backup for the county's disease prevention control clinic, so he has seen the need for staffing in long-term facilities and in home health care.

LaPorte explained that while referrals are made to home care agencies for county residents, "typically they just don't have a nurse or a home health aide available."

Kelli Ray is a social worker at the Benedictine Living Community (formerly St. Crispins) in Red Wing. She has seen burnout during the pandemic.

"I think we saw a lot of staff burnout because we were kind of the ones providing some of the

support to the residents that maybe families would have, you know, provided," Ray said. "Especially a lot of, I think, emotional support and kind of you know, supplementing some of that socialization."

During the height of the pandemic visitors were not allowed in long-term care facilities. Restrictions have eased but have not yet been fully lifted. Requirements for visiting the living community include completing a health screening, wearing a face mask and social distancing from other residents and staff.

Visitors are expected to meet in the residents' room or in a common space where social distancing is possible.

Burnout has impacted the labor shortage, but it is not the sole cause.

A statistic released in February by the Knight Family Foundation states that "more than 200,000 long-term care facility residents and staff have died due to COVID since the start of the pandemic."

This means that death in long-term care facil-



Stock image

Long-term care facilities are struggling to find staff.

ities make up about 23% of COVID-19 deaths in the United States.

The Journal of the American Medical Association published a study on April 8, 2022, which focuses on turnover in health care careers. The study notes, "long-term care workers and physicians saw an upward trend in turnover rates. Health care workers employed as health aides and assistants, those of historically marginalized racial and ethnic groups, and those with young children, particularly women, had persistently high turnover rates and were experiencing a slow recovery."

One of the conclusions of the study is that in order to fill the demand for long-term care workers, "targeted attention is needed to recruit job-seeking health care workers and to retain those currently in these jobs to lessen turnover."

The Star Tribune reported on April 9 that

"There are 23,000 job vacancies in long-term care across the state, representing a fifth of the workforce."

On Oct. 9, 2021, the Associated Press reported that "Minnesota long-term care facilities have 23,000 job openings."

LaPorte noted that one likely reason for the slow return to long-term care and home health jobs is the pay. He told the Republican Eagle, "There's only so much reimbursement through, you know, whether it's Medicare, Medicaid (or) private insurance. It's hard to say whether that will attract, especially when everybody else has raised their minimum wage or their starting wages."

Minnesota legislators are working to address the labor shortage in long-term care.

Senate Republicans are working on a \$1 billion package to address the long-term care workforce crisis.

The Minnesota Senate Republican Caucus says of the package, "Under this proposal, nursing homes and senior facilities would receive \$358 million, and staff could get a \$2 raise. Personal Care Assistance providers would get a 11% raise. ... The bill also increases spending for home care services by approximately 40%."

While there is a shortage of workers in long-term care, Ray emphasized that there are people who remained in the field through the pandemic because they are passionate about their work.

Ray explained, "So many people have stuck through the pandemic and all of the craziness because they do genuinely care about our residents and about their quality of life and ensuring that."

Readers can reach Rachel Fergus at rfergus@ourkemediagroup.com