

Our Community in the Times of COVID-19

On Friday, March 13th, 2020 at about 3:00 pm. the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Idaho. At the time of my submission of this column on March 22, there are 47 confirmed cases across the state and top to bottom. At last Friday's, March 20, County-wide response meeting it was reported that Idaho has the highest per capita confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the country. True, we have a relatively small population, but it is here and it is spreading from person to person quickly.

Everyone has to be part of the solution. I know, understand, and even sympathize with the nay-sayers as it grows increasingly difficult to sort the wheat from the chaff in today's news and on social media. My mother turns 85 today, she lives 20 minutes away, and I haven't seen her in two weeks and I am worried. I am worried that I won't be able to help her should she need it. I am worried that when it hits Pocatello the healthcare system will be too overrun to provide the care she would need should she become infected with COVID-19 too. Sally's folks are in the same circumstances. Unlike cable news and social media COVID-19 does not care about your politics, gender or age. It kills the elderly, the middle aged and anyone else whose health was previously compromised or who cannot get proper care. If you are not part of the solution you are part of the problem. As blunt as that may seem it is nonetheless true in the unique circumstance we all find ourselves.

As the week has progressed I have seen extremely good examples of Social Distancing, Respiratory Hygiene and the other measures that help slow or stop the spread of COVID-19 and I have seen those that I felt compelled to address. On Thursday of last week I declared a State of Emergency in the City of American Falls; following the Nation, State and County. If needed and not initiated by one of the other governing bodies the declaration will allow the City to change the date, meeting place or method of holding council meetings. (the change of meeting time and place should be by ordinance), restricting access to certain places, changing methods of bill payment, limiting building occupancy and establishing temporary rules for using parks or other city facilities. That same morning the doors to City Hall were locked. All City services are still being provided. Meetings with key personnel can be made by appointment or conducted over the phone. Similar protocols have been established at the County and most other local agencies. Some; however, are completely closed for business or services.

On Tuesday of last week the City established two new programs. The first is the COVID-19 Essential Update that can be found as the first link on the City's website, <http://www.cityofamericanfalls.com/covid-19-updates/> and on the Power County Press website.

The second is a program to help those who need it most. If you are infirm or in self-quarantine as directed by a doctor this service is for you. City personnel will be available to help you buy personal essentials and groceries. Service criteria include: you must be of limited mobility, feeble or weak in body or health, especially because of age or have been directed by a healthcare provider to self-isolate. Service phone number: 208-637-9241. Call this phone number. The City employee receiving your call will have a series of questions for you to answer; one of those will be your preferred method of payment. A list of your needs will be

taken. An American Falls Police Officer will come to your residence for the means of payment. A different City employee will gather all the items that are available in town that are on your list. The items will be given to the Police Officer to deliver back to you. This service will be limited to residents living within the City impact area; about three miles out of the City limits; but County residents can call the same number and it will be a Sheriff's Deputy delivering the needed supplies. This service will likely become limited to one delivery per week providing all the needed items on the list were able to be delivered. Those items not currently in stock will be delivered when they become available.

On Friday the City limited occupancy in the Golf Course Clubhouse to less than ten, began thoroughly sterilizing all golf carts with spray bleach so all surfaces are contacted and let to dry, customers will be swiping their own credit or debit card, while proper Social Distancing and proper Respiratory Hygiene is expected at all times. ALL FAMILIES GOLF FREE MONDAY AND WEDNESDAY MORNINGS UNTIL NOON as long as students are not in school.

Similarly, the NEW PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT will be installed at Lee Street as quickly as possible; it is a priority! Get out more – Practice good Social Distancing – You don't have to be antisocial – Just be social from a distance of six to ten feet. Sunshine and fresh air won't hurt any of us. Enjoy them when you can.

Lastly, our neighbors in Blaine County with 21 cases are reporting that effective immediately they will be temporarily suspending normal operations at St. Luke's Hospital Wood River. The Emergency Department will remain operational, with all admissions transferring to another appropriate facility. Surgical and OB staff are on-call to perform emergency procedures. All non-emergency and elective procedures are being postponed. Services at the clinics within the community will also be temporarily suspended. **This is what we don't want in our community. We need to make sure that we do not overwhelm our medical system. Practice Social Distancing, even if you are not showing symptoms.** As country and community we have always risen to be our best selves when faced with the worst. Please choose to be part of the solution to COVID-19!

Until next week...

Postscript: depending on circumstance this column may be suspended should my time become less available.