Special COVID-19 Edition: Serving our community in crisis

Johnson County is committed to keeping residents healthy and safe during COVID-19.

Please visit jocogov.org/coronavirus for the most up-to-date information about COVID-19 in Johnson County and all related impacts on services and events.
Extraordinary times, innovative service

Navigating through a global pandemic, mourning the death of George Floyd and witnessing the aftermath of protests and calls for change have made 2020, so far, a year that we will not forget. However, it is times like these that lead to collaboration, innovation and, hopefully, Johnson County persevering as a closer, stronger and healthier community.

We watched COVID-19 march across the globe, into the United States, and then officially enter our county with the first case announced on March 7. We were not surprised, nor unprepared, when it emerged here. We, along with other jurisdictions and entities, gathered our experience and knowledge in public health and disaster preparedness and got to work.

Our county’s school districts collaboratively decided to close buildings for a few weeks to help protect public health. When the governor closed school for the remainder of the year, schools quickly determined how to teach students online and provide food to families who rely on it. Businesses innovated new ways to serve customers during the stay-at-home order. First responders and health care workers displayed heroism day after day. Residents stayed at home as much as possible, helping us keep our COVID-19 cases down and preventing our health care system from becoming overwhelmed.

Like organizations across our community, county government took extraordinary actions that impacted our workforce. Our board, leadership and staff stepped up to meet the unprecedented challenges created by COVID-19. They worked long hours, leveraged new technologies, adapted to working from home and temporary furloughs, altered service delivery and even performed work for other departments when it was needed…all in an effort to protect the community’s health. We cannot tell every story but attempted to share as many as we could in this magazine.

Some good news emerged in our 2020 Community Survey. In your responses prior to and during COVID-19, you gave us high marks across the board, with increases in your satisfaction with our services, even during a pandemic. We appreciate the support and are happy to serve. You can view the results at jocogov.org.

Our hearts go out to those in our community who have lost a friend, loved one or colleague to COVID-19…losses which have changed families forever. With current events in mind, we will work alongside you every day, striving for a safe and healthy community where all are treated equally and fairly. As we look toward the future, our collective efforts will contribute to Johnson County’s success.

Ed Eilert
Chairman, Board of County Commissioners

Penny Postoak Ferguson
County Manager
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Pictured above: After two months of closure due to COVID-19, Johnson County Library began accepting returned materials from patrons on May 18. The response was massive - patrons returned 53 bins worth of materials to Blue Valley Library in a single day, shattering the branch’s previous record of 19 bins in one day. Above left, a Blue Valley staff member shows off the materials returned in only five hours when the branch opened to drop-offs on May 20. Returned materials are carefully handled by staff and quarantined for 72 hours before going back into circulation. The library also reopened its hold system the same week. In the first week alone, patrons placed 35,700 holds. Library branches reopened in a limited capacity on June 15. For more information about the reopening plan, visit jocolibrary.org.

Ways to engage with JoCo

Online
Visit jocogov.org to:
- Find your county commissioner
- Get answers to questions
- Learn about more than 400 services that Johnson County provides

Social media
Facebook, Twitter, Instagram: @jocogov

By phone
Call Center: 913-715-5000
Kansas Relay Operator: 800-766-3777

Board of County Commissioners’ meetings:
Attend a board meeting weekly at 9:30 a.m. Thursdays on the third floor of the Administration Building, 111 S. Cherry St., in Olathe or watch online at boccmeetings.jocogov.org.

Johnson County Elected Officials
Ed Eilert, Chairman
Becky Fast, 1st District
Jim Allen, 2nd District
Steve Klika, 3rd District
Janeé Hanzlick, 4th District
Michael Ashcraft, 5th District
Mike Brown, 6th District
Steve Howe, district attorney
Calvin Hayden, sheriff
Johnson County Election Office preserves three voting options with safety in mind

BY NATHAN CARTER

From the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, staff at the Johnson County Election Office have been taking steps to protect voters and election workers during the August and November elections.

“Our voters are used to having three ways to vote: advance voting by mail, advance voting in person, and voting at their Election Day polling location,” said Johnson County Election Commissioner Connie Schmidt. “As we’ve navigated the impact of COVID-19 on this year’s elections, our top priority has been protecting voters and election workers while preserving those three voting options.”

The Election Office started with an unprecedented step: mailing advance voting ballot applications to every voter. The mailing, sent at the end of May, included two applications for every voter. Voters who return the applications will be mailed ballots for the August primary and November general election and be able to vote safely from their homes.

Commonly called “no-excuse” voting by mail, any registered voter can apply to vote by mail for any reason in Kansas. Voters who have not returned the applications yet can still send them back and receive ballots by mail for this year’s election. Applications are also available at vob.jocoelection.org. The deadline to apply to receive a ballot by mail for the August primary election is July 28.

In-person voting will also continue to be available. Seven advance voting locations will be open for two weeks before each election, and polling locations will be open on Election Day. Physical distancing will be maintained between voters, election workers and voting equipment. Personal protective equipment will be provided to election workers and sanitation supplies will be deployed to every location.

“We’ve encouraged voters to consider voting by mail because that’s critical to keeping voters and election workers safe and healthy at our in-person voting locations. Reducing traffic will help us with the time and space needed for social distancing and sanitizing equipment,” Schmidt said.

The Election Office is also printing more paper ballots for in-person voters who choose to avoid touchscreen voting machines. Additional ballot scanning equipment will be deployed to allow both paper and electronic ballots to be counted on Election Day.

There are other steps voters can take now to ensure they are prepared to vote this year. Voters are encouraged to check their voter registration and make sure all information is correct. Check your voter registration record at voter.jocoelection.org. Voters can update their name or address (or register for the first time) by completing a new voter registration application available at jocoelection.org/registration.

The registration deadline for the August primary election is July 14. The primary election takes places on August 4. The general election will be held on November 3.
Caring for the community’s mental health

BY KEITH DAVENPORT

These past few months, we have experienced the full range of emotional experiences. As a community, we have visited the deep valleys of anxiety and summited the mountains of exceptional kindness and innovative ways to connect with one another. Through these emotional ebbs and flows, Johnson County Mental Health Center (JCMHC) has shifted services to provide for the community’s mental health needs.

Serving our community

The sudden change in schedules and the increase in physical distancing can affect anyone’s mental wellbeing. Since March, we have provided additional community resources such as a weekly positive email with coping strategies, articles, resources, special podcast episodes and at-home lessons for children through EVERFI, a digital learning platform. These resources are online at jocogov.org/mentalhealth.

Serving frontline workers

Through funding from the REACH Foundation, we provide mental health services free of charge to those serving on the frontlines of the pandemic.

Serving the homeless

In partnership with several county departments, the city of Shawnee and Shawnee Police Department, we provide a safe place for overnight parking for those living in their vehicles. Maintaining appropriate physical distancing recommendations, we provide hygiene kits and access to restrooms.

Understanding what I can control during a pandemic

BY RENEE VAN METER

Throughout the course of one day early on during the pandemic, I remember feeling hopeless, frustrated, scared, sad and lost. When my feelings and emotions are in a heightened state, I tend to think I have control over a lot more than I do! When I act out of that place of heightened emotions, I find myself wishing I hadn’t. One evening, while aimlessly scrolling through social media, I found this graphic and I remembered what I needed to do to: consider my sphere of control.

Using the sphere of control helps me identify my feelings, organize my thoughts and demonstrate responses I’m proud of. I use it often and it is as simple as taking a quiet, reflective moment to truly think about and write down what I have control over in any situation and what I need to work on letting go of. It’s what I needed to remember that even as my world changed so drastically day to day, I still can only control my own thoughts, feelings and actions! Letting go of the control I thought I had over others and other situations wasn’t and isn’t easy. I still feel scared and lost at times, but I have more energy to focus on what I can control because I have let go of all I can’t.

Visit jocogov.org/mentalhealth for more mental health resources. If you find yourself in a mental health situation where you are unsure what to do, call the Johnson County Mental Health 24/7 crisis line at 913-268-0156. Remember, you are not alone and help is available.

Renee Van Meter is an emergency services team leader with Johnson County Mental Health Center and the co-host of the It’s Okay if You’re not Okay podcast. Access the podcast online at jocogov.org/podcasts.
COVID-19 impacts the Johnson County Government budget

BY JODY HANSON

Early into the pandemic, county leadership and budget staff began projecting how COVID-19 would impact the county’s various revenue sources and quickly arrived at plans to reduce expenditures.

Projections on revenue losses

On April 2, the county manager and budget director presented the BOCC an estimated $18 million to $38 million range in revenue loss due to COVID-19. By mid-May, leadership had more information, and projected a revenue loss of approximately $24 million for the 2020 budget year.

“Impacted revenue sources include reduced collections of sales tax and Motor Vehicle taxes, a decrease in investment income due to the interest rate cuts by the Federal Reserve, and some departmental revenue losses,” said Budget Director Scott Neufeld.

Cutting expenditures

Johnson County Government took immediate action early in the pandemic in reaction to the projected revenue loss. The county implemented a hiring freeze except for essential positions, ceased nonessential spending, and utilized tools such as furloughs, reductions in overtime and deferment of capital projects. The result is expenditure cuts of approximately $25 million.

“In addition to quick action in reducing our spending, I challenged our department heads to apply a renewed emphasis on analyzing the services we provide and how we provide them to ensure we are doing so with greater levels of effectiveness and efficiency,” said County Manager Penny Postoak Ferguson. Innovations that department heads find are expected to positively impact both the current and future budget years.

Plans for 2021

This year’s budget process has been compressed but will include the same number of budget meetings as last year. Postoak Ferguson will present the board her proposed 2021 budget on July 9. To see the complete calendar for the 2021 budget process, please visit jocogov.org.
Seniors should remain cautious as Johnson County begins to reopen

BY GERALD HAY

The phased reopening of businesses and community spaces in Johnson County is underway as summer begins, but that does not mean no or fewer risks from the coronavirus.

Residents older than 65 and people with underlying health conditions, such as diabetes and heart disease, remain at high risk of hospitalization and death from COVID-19, the illness caused by the coronavirus. In both Kansas and Johnson County, most deaths have been among the elderly and high-risk populations.

So, what should older adults do to protect themselves and limit the spread of the virus? Since early March, the advice hasn’t changed much. Recommendations for staying healthy include:

• Wear cloth face coverings when outside the house or interacting with people who are not household members.
• Monitor health and potential symptoms closely; report any signs of COVID-19 to a healthcare provider.
• Limit all travel; telework if possible.
• Limit attendance at gatherings of any size outside of your household or residence.
• Do not visit nursing homes or other residential care facilities.
• If you are in, or work with, high-risk populations, monitor yourself for symptoms and get tested for COVID-19.
• If you live with high-risk individuals, conduct yourself as if you are a significant risk to the high-risk individual. Wear a face covering, wash hands frequently, and clean common surfaces regularly.

Residents should also follow guidance from Kansas Department of Health and Environment, the Johnson County Department of Health and Environment (JCDHE) and the federal government.

Stay-at-home orders have been lifted, paving the way for people to venture out in public with precautions. Guidance for aging adults is dependent on health more than age.

People are considered “high risk” if they have “underlying medical conditions, including chronic lung disease, asthma, heart conditions, severe obesity, chronic kidney disease, liver disease or who are otherwise immunocompromised.”

The conclusion of reopening plans does not mean an end to COVID-19. No vaccine or curative treatment has been approved, so high-risk individuals should continue to be vigilant about their health.

For those who choose to continue limiting their trips outside the home, technology offers many tools to stay connected to friends, family and needed resources.

AARP has great resources to help aging adults utilize video calling software, view videos and pictures from your phone or tablet on your TV, or prepare for a telehealth visit with your doctor or veterinarian. Visit aarp.org/home-family/personal-technology for more.

It’s also important to prioritize physical activity, both to counteract the effects of sitting at home and to provide a mental health boost. There are a variety of ways to stay healthy while following social distancing guidelines - we offer several suggestions on pages 18-19.

Epidemiologists from JCDHE update data daily, including positive case counts, hospitalizations, deaths, long-term care facility case counts, hospital capacity and more. View the online dashboard at jocogov.org/coronavirus.

Facts continue to matter regarding the impact of COVID-19 on aging adults. It’s true about good times and bad times as well. Life is always changing and continues to happen anyway.

In the thick of the pandemic and emerging new norm, a Persian adage, translated and historically used in multiple languages, offers guidance: this, too, shall pass.
School partnerships provide additional resources during pandemic

BY JENNIFER DUNLAY & JOE SUNDERMEYER

School nurses provide comfort on help line

The first calls started rolling into the Johnson County Community COVID-19 Hotline on March 17 – the same day Governor Laura Kelly closed schools for the rest of the year in Kansas. Calls from residents worried about symptoms, asking where to get tested for COVID-19 and if they should quarantine after travel poured in – nearly 2,000 the first week.

When the amount of calls began to outnumber the Johnson County Department of Health and Environment (JCDHE) staff available to answer them, a new solution was put into place – utilize school nurses, who were suddenly off duty for the remainder of the school year, to staff the phone lines.

A meaningful way to help

Shelby Rebeck, RN, director of health services for the Shawnee Mission School District said at the start of the crisis, school nurses were contacting her daily asking what they could do to help the community. In a meeting with Johnson County school superintendents and JCDHE, Rebeck heard about the county’s need for staff in the call center. She immediately contacted the nursing directors in every school district asking for help.

Later that afternoon, a sign-up sheet was sent around to every school nurse in Johnson County. Within 45 minutes nurses from every school district – Shawnee Mission, Blue Valley, Olathe, Spring Hill, Gardner Edgerton, and De Soto – filled the first two weeks of phone line slots, said Rebeck. “These school nurses in Johnson County are amazing.”

This partnership between the JCDHE and the school nurses came together in a matter of hours because the department already had a close working relationship with the school nurse coordinators in Johnson County. This allowed the nurses and JCDHE staff to quickly brainstorm and come up with solutions that worked for county staff, the nurse volunteers and the public.

“Most of us [nurses]... consider ourselves extensions of the public health department, so this was a very natural thing to do to help out.”
- Shelby Rebeck, RN, director of health services for Shawnee Mission School District

“I think most of us [nurses] who have worked in Johnson County for a long time consider ourselves extensions of the public health department, so this was a very natural thing to do to help out,” said Rebeck. “They [nurses] were so happy to have a meaningful way to help during this difficult time.”

Their offer came at just the right time. On March 23, the day after the Johnson County Board of Commissioners issued its first stay-at-home order, the COVID-19 hotline received its highest one-day volume of calls – a total of 608.

Megan Foreman, JCDHE program manager and the call center manager, says the nurse volunteers have freed department staff to do other tasks crucial to managing Johnson County’s response to the coronavirus pandemic, including contact tracing, discussing infection prevention techniques with long-term care facilities and developing information to share with the public.

“We are so pleased the nurses are available to educate, empower and reassure people. We surpassed 5,000 total calls on May 1. I know the people on the other end of the phone are grateful to have someone to talk to about their situation, ask for health advice, get additional resources, and just have a listening ear for a few minutes,” Foreman adds.

The call center also has Spanish-speakers on duty to answer questions and the nurses can utilize translators to serve people in other languages too. Hotline volunteers practice social distancing and good hygiene practices by limiting the number of people in the room, staying 6 feet apart and disinfecting phone stations between each 4-hour shift.

“It seemed like the right thing to do”

Ellen Hanke, RN, a school nurse at Regency Place Elementary in Olathe said, “When it became clear that the (school) buildings were going to close for the year, I knew it would be an opportunity to help the community in some way.” Hanke volunteers in the call center eight hours a week in addition to working from home updating student immunization records and getting ready for incoming students in the fall.

Cindi Tedder, RN, who has worked for 20 years as a school nurse in Olathe said, “It seemed like the right thing to do. It’s fun to talk to people and help them find out what they need and get them the services they are looking for.”
Hanke says she was surprised to learn all the services the county offers. “One of my big concerns is our elderly population, especially those that live alone. They are very fearful.” Both Hanke and Tedder have referred several people who don’t have resources or support to county services, like mental health or JCDHE’s outreach nurse program for seniors.

The COVID-19 Hotline is available to answer your health questions Monday - Friday at 913-715-2819. Hours may vary, but you can always leave a message and a nurse will return your call. For non-health questions, contact the Johnson County Call Center at 913-715-5000.

Translating critical COVID-19 information

Throughout the pandemic, the county has worked to make sure its communications were accessible by as many people as possible. Sometimes that has meant developing new ways of doing things, and cooperating with other organizations around the county to get things done.

To reach Johnson County’s Spanish speakers, the county enlisted the aid of the Olathe School District. Staff responsible for translating materials into Spanish stepped up and put in some extra time for the county.

Language Management Specialist Samanta Landa responded to the need for translation help, often in the evening and on weekends. Though Google translate is available on all of the county website’s pages, Landa helped create jocogov.org’s first custom Spanish page and has helped keep it updated with the most current developments related to COVID-19.

Thanks to help from the Olathe School District, jocogov.org now has a coronavirus information page available in Spanish.

“It was a pleasure for me to be able to help the Spanish speaking community during these unprecedented times in which we are living,” said Landa. “Each one in JoCo has done their part, making sure that the lives of those in need feel some relief in one way or another. It has been a blessing to be a part of this amazing group that has given its best in these uncertain times.”

Thanks to the service provided by volunteers from local school districts, Johnson County Government’s efforts have been able to reach more people and help more residents find the information they need about the coronavirus pandemic. We are thankful and proud to work alongside our community partners to serve residents.
The world around us is changing, but Johnson County Community College is still your go-to destination for an exceptional education at competitive tuition rates.

Whether you want to continue your education, advance at work or change careers, we have the resources to make it happen. Our flexible online and virtual class options fit your schedule and allow you to learn from anywhere—including the comfort of home. So, what are you waiting for?

Let JCCC help you find your tomorrow.

Visit jccc.edu/enroll to learn more.
Protect yourself from COVID-19

As the county begins to open back up, how can you stay safe while out in the community? Here are a few tips to keep in mind whether you’re going to work, out to eat, or just to run errands.

**Wash or sanitize your hands regularly.**
Frequent hand-washing remains one of the best and easiest ways to prevent the spread of disease, including the coronavirus. Hand-washing is preferred, but an alcohol-based hand sanitizer is a good thing to keep in your car or purse and at your desk at work.

**Avoid touching your face.**
Keep your hands away from your eyes, nose and mouth, especially after contact with high-touch surfaces such as doorknobs, bathroom sinks, elevator buttons, front counters in offices or restaurants, and public transit.

**Maintain 6 feet of distance from others when possible.**
When you’re at a restaurant or business, pay attention to the distance between your group and the one next to you. If you are seated less than 6 feet apart, ask for more space. Transmission is more likely the longer you are close to someone, so it’s okay to be close very briefly, such as passing in the aisle at a grocery store.

**Wear a barrier mask when distance is not possible.**
In some situations, such as a hair or nail salon, 6 feet of distance is not possible. Both parties should wear a barrier mask (cloth or disposable) to reduce the risk of transmission. Employees in these types of situations should disinfect surfaces and wash their hands frequently.

**Cover your cough or sneeze.**
Droplets from your cough or sneeze travel much farther than droplets from breathing or talking and have a higher potential to infect others. Even if you don’t think you have the coronavirus, you should always cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze to avoid spreading germs.

**Enjoy the great outdoors.**
Better air circulation and wide open spaces make outdoor activities a safer choice. If you eat at a restaurant, ask for outside seating when possible. If you want to meet up with a friend, lunch at the park (6 feet apart, of course) is your best bet.

**Keep social contacts limited.**
If possible, limit your contacts to those in your household, even when you go out.

**If you are sick, stay home.**
If you have any symptoms of illness, including cough, fever, shortness of breath, fatigue, or chills, stay at home and call your primary care doctor to see if you should be tested for COVID-19.
On March 7, Johnson County had its first presumed positive case of COVID-19. The information was announced in a rare Saturday evening news conference, first in Topeka, and then in Johnson County. Since then, it’s been a race to slow the spread of the disease to reduce the burden on the region’s health care system and prevent illness and death.

“It’s a countywide effort to make sure we’re responding appropriately,” said Chairman Ed Eilert, Board of County Commissioners (BOCC), during a March 12 board meeting.

Preparing for the pandemic

Although March marked the beginning of community spread to Johnson County, preparation was already underway to combat the disease. In the weeks before the county’s first case, Johnson County Emergency Management assembled an internal task force of county departments to address COVID-19. The group also looked at potential impacts. In February, Emergency Management scheduled weekly meetings with community stakeholder groups regarding the virus that continue today.

In February, Johnson County was already implementing screening questions for 911 dispatchers to determine if MEDACT and law enforcement might be responding to a person infected with COVID-19. This information allowed first responders to take protective measures and communicate risks to hospitals.

“It’s very scripted questioning,” said Dr. Ryan Jacobsen, Johnson County EMS Systems medical director, during a Feb. 17 JoCo on the Go podcast episode. “And if they meet certain criteria, we will do some of the enhanced caller interrogation, which informs crews about transmission risks before they get to the call.”

Keeping a close eye on trends in heavily impacted states and countries, the county anticipated that it was just a matter of time before a case was detected in Kansas. Because Johnson County is the state’s most populous county, it was likely that Kansas’ first case would be here. And that’s just what happened.

“We should all be concerned,” said then Interim Director Mary Beverly, Johnson County Department of Health and Environment (JCDHE), at a March 7 news conference, where the first case was announced. “This is a new coronavirus that we don’t have immunity to.”

Early response

The first case in Johnson County was a female under 50, who isolated at

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**Tracking response to the coronavirus in Johnson County**

Early intervention slowed the onset of new cases in Johnson County and gave medical and public health professionals a chance to prepare for reopening. Chart continues on next page.

- **March 7:** First confirmed case in Johnson County
- **March 11:** World Health Organization declares global pandemic
- **March 13:** Chairman Ed Eilert declares a state of emergency in Johnson County; gatherings over 250 people prohibited.
- **March 16:** Dr. LeMaster closes schools through April 5.
- **March 19:** BOCC extends the county’s state of emergency declaration for 60 days.
- **March 17:** Dr. LeMaster closes restaurants, bars, clubs and movie theaters; mass gatherings over 10 prohibited.
- **March 22:** With CORE4 partners, Dr. LeMaster issues a stay-at-home order for non-essential activities through April 23.
- **March 28:** Governor Kelly issues a statewide stay-at-home order through April 19, which supersedes Johnson County’s order.
home after becoming ill. She and other early cases contracted the virus while traveling. But after one week, JCDHE epidemiologists identified community spread – individuals who had contracted the illness within the county.

The night the first case was confirmed, the county’s Emergency Operations Center (EOC) was activated to coordinate internal and external response and communication. The EOC has remained activated every day since.

JCDHE immediately rolled out a robust contact tracing protocol that was necessary to quarantine those who came in contact with positive cases.

The speed at which the virus spread prompted quick action by the county. On March 13, less than one week after the first positive case, Chairman Eilert declared a state of emergency for Johnson County. The declaration was made after significant collaboration with a wide variety of county organizations, city leadership, city emergency management liaisons, public safety officials and school superintendents. The declaration allowed the chairman to establish measures intended to limit the spread of COVID-19 in the community. It also provided Johnson County Government access to resources, such as personal protective equipment for first responders and health care personnel. The declaration prohibited public gatherings in the county of 250 or more people. The declaration was renewed on March 19.

At the same time, the county began to strongly encourage the public to utilize alternate methods of doing business with the county, such as online services.

One important and early way the county decreased public interaction was by closing schools. This began as a local and collaborative effort, with the county facilitating discussions with school districts. On March 16, Local Health Officer Dr. Joseph LeMaster signed a public health order to close schools in Johnson County through April 5. The county and school districts held a joint news conference on March 17 to announce the decision. The following day, Governor Laura Kelly announced an executive order to close schools in Kansas for the remainder of the school year.

At the onset of the disease, it was clear that residents needed information quickly, as the situation was constantly evolving. The jocogov.org/coronavirus webpage includes a comprehensive dashboard so the public can access data such as the number of positive, negative and presumed recovered cases, along with deaths and critical care capacity.

Stay-at-home order issued
On March 17, Dr. LeMaster issued a public health emergency order. It prohibited gatherings of more than 10 people and temporarily closed restaurants and dining facilities (except for delivery and carryout), bars, taverns, clubs and movie theaters in Johnson County.

On March 22, after multiple conversations between Johnson County’s leadership and different groups, including the BOCC, city officials, chambers of commerce and school districts, Dr. LeMaster issued a stay-at-home order. The order allowed only essential businesses to operate. The BOCC, sitting as the Board of Public Health, supported this action, which went into effect on March 24.

“These decisions are never easy, but the objective is to protect the health of our total community,” said Chairman Eilert.

The action was also taken in conjunction with other jurisdictions in the metro area. Later, Governor Kelly also followed suit by issuing a statewide stay-at-home order, which Johnson County then adopted. Dr. LeMaster commented on the need for the order at the time it was made.

April 7: Governor Kelly issues an executive order prohibiting mass gatherings of more than 10 people.

April 16: Governor Kelly extends the statewide stay-at-home order through May 3.

For more information about coronavirus, the county’s response, and how you can prevent the spread, visit jocogov.org/coronavirus.
Task force makes recommendations to safely reopen economy

In mid-April, the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) authorized the formation of the Johnson County COVID-19 Recovery Planning Task Force. This group was charged with recommending a reopening plan to the BOCC.

The task force efforts balanced the dual priorities of keeping the workforce and public healthy and allowing businesses to reopen in a phased approach. Members represented a broad cross-section of Johnson County’s governance and economy. The task force met four times from April 22-28, in addition to small group work, and finalized its plan on April 28. They met on Zoom and meetings were streamed live on Facebook.

After considering the task force recommendations, the board voted to table the plan and follow the phases of Governor Laura Kelly’s reopening plan. Commissioners expressed appreciation for the time and dedication by task force members in preparing a recovery plan for the county. However, they determined that following the state’s plan would prevent confusion about which businesses would open in which phase.

An archive of the task force’s documents, including the plan presented to the BOCC, is available online at jocogov.org/johnson-county-covid-19-recovery-planning-task-force.

“By taking these additional steps, we can both protect our critical care bed capacity and limit the transmission of the disease in our community to reduce the probability that we’ll see an excessive number of deaths here,” said Dr. LeMaster.

As of May 28, the county had nearly 800 positive cases and 62 deaths related to COVID-19. The first death was reported on March 21.

Data collection and testing

Community testing was an essential component of the county’s comprehensive effort to understand and address the spread of COVID-19 in Johnson County. Dr. Sammi Areola, director of JCDHE, established a testing plan that included surveying the general public for symptoms and drive-thru testing clinics for both the general public and essential workers.

“We need data to support our decisions, but we also need data to determine the effectiveness of the steps that we have taken,” said Dr. Areola. As of late May, 2.7% of Johnson County’s population have been tested for COVID-19.

Personal protective equipment

As concern over a spike in cases grew, so did the county’s response to secure personal protective equipment (PPE) for health care workers and others in the community.

Emergency Management worked closely with federal and state partners to procure needed items. But additional efforts were necessary to get more barrier masks. The community responded by sewing cloth masks and donating them to MED-ACT. As of mid-May, 4,200 had been received. The county called on the private market to get even more masks. Since early March, the EOC has worked to meet the needs of the community by leveraging local resources, ordering, receiving and distributing supplies, including masks, gloves and other items from the state of Kansas and the nation’s Strategic National Stockpile. The county continues to supply PPE to ensure that health care workers, first responders and others are safe.

Reopening the county and economy

There’s no doubt that Johnson County’s economy has taken a hit. A local economist predicts it will be years before the county is “back to normal.” Jeff Shackelford, president and CEO of Enterprise Center in Johnson County, during an April 27 JoCo on the Go podcast, shared his thoughts on the pandemic’s economic impact.

“I think it’s going to be a long road,” Shackelford said.

Lifting the stay-at-home order as quickly and safely as possible has been a high priority. On April 20, the county assembled the Johnson County Recovery Planning Task Force to make recommendations on how the county could support local businesses while minimizing the risk of disease transmission. After many hours of discussion, it offered a plan.

In an effort to reduce confusion, the county ultimately decided to follow the governor’s phased proposal: Ad Astra: A Plan to Reopen Kansas, which was announced on April 30. This approach was supported by regional partners.

“It has been a difficult time for all of us,” said Chairman Ed Eilert. “And I want to recognize the difficulties, the challenges, the sacrifices that have been made by each

May 1: BOCC votes to table the Recovery Planning Task Force recommendations and follow the phases of Gov. Kelly’s reopening plan.

May 11: County government buildings begin a phased plan to reopen to the public over a two-week period.

April 30: Dr. LeMaster extends Johnson County’s stay-at-home order through May 10 to better align with the reopening of other metro area jurisdictions.

May 11: Johnson County enters Phase 1 of Gov. Kelly’s Ad Astra: A Plan to Reopen Kansas. Some non-essential businesses allowed to reopen; gatherings limited to 10 people.
one of our community members.”

Although the county supported the governor’s four-phased approach of reopening, Dr. LeMaster, in his role as the local health officer with statutory authority to issue public health orders, issued a stay-at-home order for an additional week to ease the county into reopening with a measured approach.

“The decision to extend the stay-at-home order was one taken with a lot of consideration,” said Dr. LeMaster.

On Thursday, May 27, Governor Kelly vetoed House Bill 2054, passed by the Kansas Legislature, to weaken her emergency power. The state and Johnson County had been in Phase 2 of her reopening plan. The governor announced at that point that her plan would serve as guidance instead of orders to county health officials, who can impose health, business and mass gathering limits. The county strongly encourages adherence to the governor’s original plan with some timeline adjustments.

The county continues to track testing data to prevent a second wave of disease transmission, while working with local businesses to support economic recovery.

“The health department is committed to trying to mitigate the spread of coronavirus, but the reality is that coronavirus is still in our community, and is still spreading,” said Elizabeth Holzschuh, JCDHE epidemiologist. Until there is a vaccine, COVID-19 will continue to be a public health concern. Everyone can do their part by maintaining physical distance of 6 feet or more, limiting large gatherings and washing hands and surfaces frequently.

To learn more about the virus in Johnson County and the county’s response, visit jocogov.org/coronavirus.

### JoCo employees step up during pandemic

County employees rise to the challenge as pandemic changes service delivery and resident needs

County employees have been heavily involved in community-wide efforts to prevent the spread of coronavirus and assist those who have been affected, directly or indirectly, by the pandemic. Employees have also jumped into new roles as the epidemic reshapes the needs and functions of county government. Here are a few amazing stories of county employees who went above and beyond to innovatively serve residents.

**Staffing public hotline**

The Records and Tax Administration (RTA) department, which operates a call center from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday - Friday, made its hotline available to the public on several evenings and weekends following the announcement of the stay-at-home order and the reopening plan. Thirteen employees staffed the call center during the extended hours, including nine who do not typically answer calls or respond to resident emails.

On March 22, after the stay-at-home order was announced, RTA handled 425 calls in six hours with a maximum wait time of 3:44 minutes and only seven calls on hold at the peak calling volume. Spanish language interpreters from MED-ACT and JCDHE were on hand as well.

JCDHE is also currently staffing a health hotline (913-715-2819) as well as a child care hotline for parents and providers (913-477-8361) offered by the Child Care Licensing division.

**Delivering critical meals**

Area Agency on Aging (AAA) employees went the extra mile to ensure meals were delivered to homebound aging adults during the stay-at-home order.

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**May 22:** Johnson County enters Phase 2 of the Ad Astra plan. Mass gatherings limited to 15 people; bars and clubs, community centers, pools, and large entertainment venues.

**May 28:** BOCC votes to support messaging that strongly recommends adhering to the Ad Astra plan, and approves creation of a Johnson County guidance plan (effective May 28 - June 11) reflective of the Ad Astra plan’s Phase 3.
Home-Delivered Meals program volunteers are delivering weekly to 575 aging adults with the support of office and distribution center employees with AAA and Human Services. They are assisted by employees from other county departments who don’t typically do that type of work, like transit employees and Johnson County Library couriers.

These deliveries are so important because they include the opportunity for a friendly visit and a check-in on the well-being of Home-Delivered Meals recipients. That’s more important than ever, considering the impact of the pandemic on older adults.

**Investigating the spread of the coronavirus**

A team of “disease detectives” at JCDHE is doing exceptional work in investigating the coronavirus in Johnson County.

Epidemiologist Elizabeth Holzschuh, with a team of four JCDHE epidemiologists and disease investigators, conducts investigations on how a positive case contracted the disease and then identifies others who might have been exposed. They are assisted by 30 JCDHE staffers.

Working long hours and often from home, they all share the same mission: slowing the spread of COVID-19, monitoring positive cases and saving lives.

**Supplying masks and shields**

Staff and volunteers at Johnson County Developmental Supports (JCDS) and Friends of JCDS are helping to fill a shortage of barrier masks. Completed masks are delivered to Phoenix Hospice; Johnson County MED-ACT; the Community Developmental Disabilities Organization (CDDO), a division of JCDS; and other local organizations.

The Black & Veatch MakerSpace at Central Resource Library in Overland Park has also been putting in overtime to make PPE.

Prior to the pandemic, the library’s MakerSpace facilitators used their skills to help the community learn and create, from 3D printing, laser cutting and sewing to music and video production. Now they are using those skills and equipment to help the community by sewing cloth masks and printing parts for face shields. MakerSpace facilitators, with sewing help from other library staff, have donated more than 750 fabric masks to JCDS and 360 face shields to Johnson County Emergency Medical Services.

**Getting residents to dialysis appointments**

The Human Services Catch-a-Ride (CaR) volunteer transportation program partnered with Johnson County Transit to provide continued service to current CaR dialysis riders.

CaR riders in need. “We recognized an opportunity for transit to meet a need with capacity in our department,” said Josh Powers, the county’s business liaison for public transportation.

Five residents are currently using microtransit to receive round-trip rides to dialysis three times a week.

Transit staff are also delivering Meals-on-Wheels, masks and other PPE as needed to support residents in need.

**Developing techniques to sanitize masks**

Forensic scientists at the Johnson County Sheriff’s Office Criminalistics Laboratory developed an innovative way to help our community’s first responders and frontline employees. Crime Lab staff adapted technology in their lab to sanitize N95 masks and make them safe for reuse.

Forensic scientists at the Criminalistics Lab can sanitize multiple N95 masks in 60 minutes or less by repurposing three evidence drying cabinets and using UV lights. Once the process is complete, the N95 masks are provided to the county’s first responders.

Our many thanks to the county employees and volunteers who have continued to serve residents and clients throughout the coronavirus pandemic, using innovative methods and being willing to do whatever is needed to ensure the continued delivery of critical county programs and services. Videos about many of these stories are available at facebook.com/jocogov.
The 1918 Spanish flu in Kansas

BY GERALD HAY

The Spanish influenza outbreak, the world’s deadliest flu pandemic, occurred slightly more than a century ago.

The 1918 pandemic globally killed at least 20 million and up to 50 million people in three waves during and after World War I. An estimated 675,000 deaths occurred in the United States. That was twice the number of American casualties (both killed and wounded) in the war, which totaled almost 323,000. Approximately 12,000 Kansans died from the flu or pneumonia, which frequently accompanied the illness.

There are two main similarities and one big difference between the bygone Spanish flu and the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Both diseases began their national and global fury with no vaccine for prevention or cure. Both are highly contagious viruses that cause serious, sometimes fatal, respiratory illness, but COVID-19 is not the flu.

Kansas tried to stop the Spanish flu in 1918, beginning in early October when Dr. Samuel Crumbine, secretary of the State Board of Health, issued a shutdown order.

“As a physician, Crumbine stressed education as a weapon to fight the flu and launched a statewide program to inform the citizens of ways to prevent the spread of influenza,” according to Judith R. Johnson’s “Kansas in the ‘Grippe:’ The Spanish Influenza Epidemic of 1918.”

Visitors were barred from all state institutions. Churches, schools, places of amusement and movie theaters were closed. Public meetings were discontinued. Strict quarantine was imposed on influenza patients. Kansans were advised to practice personal hygiene and avoid crowds.

As the number of new flu cases throughout the state increased, local officials instituted additional closing orders for their communities, including temporarily closing of businesses and cancelling of college classes and county fairs.

The statewide closing order was lifted on Nov. 2, but local bans continued for several weeks with frequent outbreaks reported.

During the last three months of 1918 and the first three months of 1919, 174,094 cases of influenza were reported in Kansas. All restrictions were gradually lifted by the summer of 1919 as the disease finally subsided.

Author and medical historian John M. Barry thinks the first cases in the flu epidemic most likely originated in early 1918 in Haskell County in southwest Kansas. Barry admits “it has never been clear, however, where this pandemic began…it is impossible to answer this question with absolute certainty.”

The first major outbreak of the virus occurred in early March at Camp Funston, a huge army base and part of Fort Riley. Several thousand soldiers were hospitalized for a flu that killed 38 men.

From Kansas, soldiers were sent to the Western Front. The flu epidemic became a pandemic in the European war zone, quickly spreading to nearly every continent.

The name “Spanish flu” is a misnomer. With no censorship since Spain had remained neutral in the war, Spanish newspapers were able to freely report the disease. As a result, numbers reported from Spain were much higher than other countries, creating a false impression that Spain was the epicenter of the pandemic.

The rest is history.
Safe summer activities to get you out of the house

BY JOE SUNDERMEYER

The arrival of the coronavirus pandemic has meant that we have all had to adapt. But as summer approaches, there are plenty of activities you can enjoy while maintaining physical distancing. We can think of at least 18. See how many more you and your family can come up with!

Johnson County is home to lots of great outdoor space that is perfect for exercising or just getting a breath of fresh air.

Remember, it’s best to wear a mask to protect others outside your family if you’re headed out of the house for these activities if you won’t be able to maintain physical distancing. And stay at least 6 feet away from the people you encounter on the way.

For more detailed information about what’s open and what’s permitted, see the Johnson County Park and Recreation District website at jcprd.com or the State of Kansas’ Department of Wildlife Parks and Tourism site at ksoutdoors.com. As activities continue to reopen, the most updated information will always be available online.

1. **Running, walking or hiking on county trails**  
   You can always run or walk safely in your neighborhood or on any of the county’s many trails.

2. **Biking**  
   Take the family or go on a solo ride along one of the miles of paved biking trails around the county like the 17-mile Mill Creek Streamway Park trail.

3. **Picnic lunch at a park or beach**  
   If you’ve got the family out of the house for that bike ride, you might take a picnic lunch to eat along the way. Picnics are also great for a day at the beach. Shawnee Mission Park Beach opens for Friday-Sunday operations on June 12; Kill Creek Park Beach will not open this year.

4. **Kite flying**  
   After lunch, there are lots of great open spaces in Johnson County to teach the kids how to fly a kite.

5. **Fishing**  
   As long as you maintain your physical distance, which is a good idea anyway when you’re wetting a line, you can fish along the banks of any of the county’s public lakes and streams. Make sure you secure a state permit and, if fishing in county lakes, a county permit as well. Boat rentals are now available daily at Shawnee Mission Park Marina; Kill Creek Park Marina will open for weekend rentals on Aug. 9.

6. **Tennis/pickleball**  
   Sports where players don’t share equipment and are able to maintain a safe distance are permitted throughout the county. The county’s courts are open for singles play only for now.
7. **Golf**
All the public courses around the county are open if players pay for their round ahead of time and maintain physical distancing while on the course.

8. **Croquet**
Chase a ball around the backyard and get the kids involved in a little friendly competition.

9. **Running in the sprinkler**
Include your whole family in the water fun by turning on the sprinklers and joining the kids in the yard.

10. **Camping**
Get ready to dust off that pup tent and gas up the camper. Public campgrounds are open around the state.

11. **Catching fireflies**
After the sun goes down, your sprinkler running fun can transition to catching fireflies (just be sure to practice catch and release where your insect friends are concerned).

12. **Making s’mores**
After all the fireflies are caught, join the family around the barbecue grill or firepit for some s’mores.

13. **Stargazing**
Download a free astronomy app on your smartphone and you’ll be identifying constellations in minutes. It’s a great family activity after the s’mores are gone.

14. **Gardening**
Now’s the time to plant that garden you’ve always wanted. Either alone or with the kids, gardening can be a great time for relaxation and fresh air. New to gardening or just looking for new tips? Johnson County Research & Extension operates a gardening hotline staffed by Master Gardeners ready to answer your questions. Call 913-715-7050 or email garden.help@jocogov.org.

15. **Sidewalk chalk**
 Beautify your street with some family art in the driveway.

16. **Birdwatching**
Did you know Kansas ranks third in the nation for the diversity of its bird population? There are 225 different species of birds in the state, so if you hear a songbird outside you want to identify, grab your binoculars (or your smartphone) and add them to your list.

17. **Yoga**
The pandemic is adding to everyone’s stress level. Wind down and get fit by practicing yoga. Get up early and do a little yoga outside for a morning mental health boost. JCPRD will offer in-person yoga classes at the Mill Creek Activity Center starting in late June.

18. **Guided museum tours**
Johnson County Museum is now offering experiences by appointment only. Sign up online at jocomuseum.org to visit the museum, KidScape, or Lanesfield Historic Site.

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### Summer Reading Recommendations

If you’d rather relax outside with a book than venture out this summer, check out these recommendations from Johnson County Library staff. These fantasy reads are inspired by this year’s Summer Reading theme, Imagine Your Story. Learn more about Summer Reading at jocolibrary.org/summerreading.

#### ADULTS

**Landline** by Rainbow Rowell
A “what-if” tale of a woman who finds that she can talk to a younger version of her husband through an old landline telephone.

**The Way of Kings** by Brandon Sanderson
The first book in a multi-volume fantasy epic exploring diplomacy, magic and destiny.

#### TEENS

**The Kingdom of Back** by Marie Lu
Nannerl Mozart, wanting the fame of her younger brother, makes a pact with a magical stranger in this blend of fantasy and historical fiction.

**Infinity Son** by Adam Silvera
Twin brothers Emil and Brighton live in a New York where magical creatures have been battling for generations.

#### KIDS

**Future of the Time Dragon** by Tracey West

**The Boy Who Grew Dragons** by Andy Shepherd
What will a boy do when he discovers a tree in his backyard can grow dragons?
Board of County Commissioners responds to COVID-19

BY JODY HANSON

At the March 12 meeting of the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC), staff reported on COVID-19, and Chairman Ed Eilert announced he was postponing the State of the County address due to coronavirus. From that day forward, and for the following months, COVID-19 has been a majority of the BOCC business sessions and changed the meeting format.

Declarations and orders

Some of the board’s first actions regarding COVID-19 were related to creating orders and declarations that ratified orders issued by Chairman Eilert or the Johnson County local health officer, Dr. Joseph LeMaster.

On March 19, the board declared a State of Local Disaster Emergency for Johnson County, Kansas. This declaration:

- Extended for 60 days the chairman’s State of Disaster Emergency ordered on March 13, set to expire in seven days.
- Ratified all public health orders, current and future, issued by Dr. LeMaster or the Johnson County Board of Public Health.
- Allowed Johnson County to access federal funding and resources.
- Included temporary amendments to the county’s competitive procurement processes for the efficient continuity of county services, such as suspending or waiving current competitive procurement process for the acquisition of goods and services and authorizing renewals of up to six months for any vendor contracts set to expire during the declaration, upon mutual agreement of both parties.

In that same meeting, sitting as the Board of Public Health, the board issued a public health order, temporarily closing all restaurants, dining facilities, bars, taverns, clubs and movie theatres, as well as prohibiting public gatherings of more than 10 people.

Funding for testing and protective equipment

In March, the county’s lack of available testing equipmen from the state became a greater concern. Johnson County Department of Health and Environment (JCDHE) needed more data to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the community. County officials identified a growing and unmet need to test people who were symptomatic or asymptomatic, representing all demographics and populations from all corners of the county.

At a special meeting on March 30, the board authorized a program for additional COVID-19 testing in an amount not to exceed $400,000. Johnson County entered into contracts with laboratories to provide testing materials, receive samples, analyze specimens and report results. JCDHE used the materials for drive-thru testing clinics of both essential workers and random population samplings, plus testing of residents and staff at long-term care facilities.
Similarly, due to a global demand for personal protective equipment, at a special meeting on April 10, the board awarded a contract in an amount not to exceed $285,000 for the purchase of personal protective equipment including N95 masks, gloves and disposable gowns. First responders, public safety and health care workers were in urgent need of these materials.

Looking toward reopening and recovery
On April 20, the board authorized the creation of a Recovery Planning Task Force to strategize and implement a phased approach to reopening the economy.

The task force included many sectors representing a broad section of Johnson County’s economy, including chambers of commerce, small business, public safety, cities and non-profit organizations.

The group held several public meetings streamed live online and on Facebook and made its final recommendation to the board at the end of April. Chairman Eilert, Vice Chairman Mike Brown and Fourth District Commissioner Janeé’ Hanzlick were task force members.

Meeting online and more often
“We have unusual circumstances in our meeting this morning,” said Chairman Eilert at the start of the March 26 BOCC regular business session.

On March 25, the county’s Administrative Building was closed to the public to reduce the spread of COVID-19. The following day, the board held its first regular business session virtually. Board members and staff communicated through Zoom, and the public viewed the meeting via the county’s online legislative management system and Facebook page. The meeting, and those that followed, opened with audio of commissioners and staff reciting the Pledge of Allegiance while the video showed the American flag.

Each meeting included a COVID-19 update with reports from JCDHE, the local health officer, county management and others involved in mitigation efforts. Meetings also had occasional non-COVID-19 items for board authorization, with staff available to answer questions through Zoom.

Throughout the spring, the board held special meetings for COVID-19 updates in addition to its regular Thursday business sessions. Plans are underway to make the BOCC hearing room safe for a June return to in-person meetings.

Watch Board of County Commissioners meetings every Thursday morning on Facebook Live at 9:30 a.m. at facebook.com/jocogov or on our website at boccmeetings.jocogov.org. Closed captioning and ASL interpretation are available for the hearing-impaired.
Fraudsters try to capitalize on coronavirus fears

Bad actors use email, phone calls, text messages and in-person visits

BY NICOLE BLACKWELL

As the coronavirus (COVID-19) spread, fraudsters began capitalizing on residents’ fears for their own financial benefit. Bad actors are scamming people by email, phone, text messages and even in person.

Security experts with the Johnson County Department of Technology and Innovation warn that some of the most common scams have included:

**Government impersonators:** Scammers reach out to people through social media, emails or phone calls pretending to be from the government, even the Johnson County Government or the Johnson County Sheriff’s Office. In some cases, they go door-to-door to try and convince people they need to provide money for coronavirus testing, financial relief or medical equipment.

The government will not reach out in this way. No government agency will ask for your personal information for financial benefits. If you receive an email, text message or phone call claiming to help you get your benefits, do not respond.

If you are eligible to receive benefits, the federal government will mail you a check or direct deposit to your bank account. The IRS’s first form of communication is by mail, not by phone.

**Fraudulent cures or medical equipment:** This is one of the most concerning threats as bad actors try to sell fake cures or treatments for COVID-19, such as a $79 at-home test kit. They’re even trying to sell fake products that are in high demand, such as masks. Some of these products may be dangerous to your health or even fatal. Never accept a medical treatment or virus test from anyone other than your doctor, pharmacist or local health department.

**Work-from-home fraud:** People who are out of work and at home are vulnerable to work-from-home scams. If someone you don’t know contacts you and wants you to urgently pay them in return for a job, you’re dealing with a criminal. Legitimate jobs will not ask you to pay them.

In addition to fraudsters, price gouging sometimes happens during a crisis.

The Johnson County District Attorney’s Office has received reports of suspected price gouging of items such as disinfectant wipes.

Price gouging during a state of emergency violates the Kansas Consumer Protection Act. Governor Kelly declared a state of emergency on March 12.

During a declared state of emergency, businesses in Kansas are prohibited from significantly raising prices of necessary goods or services. This includes consumer food and health items, as well as medical supplies and services. A 25% increase in the good or service as a result of the state of emergency declaration constitutes a violation of the Kansas Consumer Protection Act, K.S.A. 50-6,106 and K.S.A. 50-623 et seq.

Johnson County District Attorney Stephen Howe encourages residents who have observed a significant price increase since the declared state of emergency to contact his consumer hotline at 913-715-3003.

“We’ll process that information, review it, contact the company and follow-up with you,” Howe said.

If you believe you’ve been the victim of a scam, call your local law enforcement.

### Common Characteristics of COVID-19 Scams

The FBI has identified some common characteristics of scams. Watch for these red flags in emails and letters:

- Messages from unknown parties that may contain broken English with grammatical errors.
- A subject designed to spark interest such as “PPE for Sale”, “list of COVID Outbreaks in your area”, etc., or offers that are too good to be true.
- Messages that contain your personal information and/or accuse you of visiting adult websites, cheating on a spouse or being involved in other compromising situations.
- Messages that threaten to send a video or other compromising information to family, friends, coworkers, or social network contacts if a ransom is not paid.
- An email or letter that provides a short window to pay, typically 48 hours.
Johnson County Museum collecting COVID-19 history

BY CAITLIN FERGUSON

Museum staff created “Rising to the Challenge: Suburban Strength in Difficult Times” in response to the pandemic. The exhibit looks at difficult times in the county’s history, and how the community responded with innovation and resilience. The exhibit opened June 1.

The words historic and unprecedented have been tossed around casually by a wide variety of people throughout the COVID-19 crisis, from politicians, economists and doctors to countless automatic ‘out of office’ reply emails. There’s no question that the coronavirus and its associated public health response are making history – a period in history that none of us will ever forget. That also means Johnson County residents need to start thinking like historians to preserve memories and artifacts from the pandemic for the benefit of future generations.

To that end, Johnson County Museum staff members have launched an initiative called “Collecting COVID-19,” which asks residents of Johnson County to submit written descriptions of the way that the coronavirus has altered their daily lives.

The museum has launched an online form where the public is encouraged to reflect on and share their COVID-19 experience. Residents can also submit ideas for objects, photographs and documents that capture the essence of what this pandemic has meant to families, businesses and the community. This information may be used in a future museum exhibit.

Anne Jones, curator of collections for the Johnson County Museum, says that representing a broad spectrum of voices is just as important as collecting a variety of materials.

“We want to hear from students and teachers, parents and small business owners, even leaders and politicians – anyone whose life was significantly changed by the coronavirus. It’s also important that we hear from those who disagreed with the response to the threat of the virus or felt measures were too extreme. Addressing that tension, which is a very real part of our experience, is crucial to accurately recording this moment in history.”

If you’d like to participate, go to jcprd.com/collecting. A museum staff member will review your submission and may respond with additional questions.

Thinking about pre-arranging?

For more information, visit our websites or call 913-451-1860.

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