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50 cents

As county sees first COVID-19 cases, distance is the watchword

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

The first confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Georgetown County were reported this week as state health officials said the coronavirus pandemic had reached the "acceleration phase." Two cases were reported Monday.

The state Department of Health and Environmental Control does not release information about the location of individual cases. "We're not releasing details that could contribute to identifying any individual,"

a spokeswoman for the State Emergency Response Team said. "We're recommending everyone take the same disease prevention practices."

Those include limiting travel, maintaining social distancing, frequent hand washing and avoiding touching your face.

"People tend to congregate because they have a false sense of security," Dr. Linda Bell, the state epidemiologist, said at a press conference with the governor this week. "It is a behavior change that we need."

Without information about

Morning shoppers wait for Publix to open.

Tanya Ackerman/Coastal Observer

people who are infected, first responders are "flying blind when responding to emergency situations," the S.C. Association of Counties said in a letter to Gov. Henry McMaster, urging him to change the policy.

The association proposed that county emergency managers be notified about the location of people who have tested

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EDUCATION

State extends school closing through April

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

Georgetown County School District staff suspected that the shutdown due to the coronavirus would be more than two weeks, and had already planned for it before the governor extended it another five weeks.

"I'm optimistic that as a group we're doing all we can as a county, certainly as a school district, and everybody is working together," Superintendent Randy Dozier said. "The attitude is really great. We're here every day working and cleaning. We're trying to make the best out of a difficult situation."

The district added deliveries to its feeding program this week, but will cut the number of days, though not the number of meals, starting next week.

"I don't want our folks to get worn out and stressed out," Dozier said. "I'm trying to give them a little bit of a break."

Meals will be distributed at 11 feeding sites and six bus stops on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. Children will receive one breakfast and two lunches on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Waccamaw Elementary School will distribute meals from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., and a school bus will drop off meals at Mount Zion Baptist Church on Parkersville Road between 11:30 and 11:45 a.m.

The district distributed more than 20,000 meals after the

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Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Chromebooks were handed out last week. Teachers now have to come up with new lesson plans.



Photos by Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

The Rev. Wil Keith records his Sunday worship service a day early at Holy Cross-Faith Memorial Episcopal Church.

CHURCHES

Keeping the faith

Worship moves online, preserving normalcy during troubled times

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

Local pastors are working hard to make sure that social distancing doesn't include spiritual distancing.

With a ban on gatherings of more than 10 people in place due to the coronavirus, churches have started either live streaming Sunday services, or posting pre-recorded videos of services and sermons.

The Rev. Don Williams of Pawleys Island Community Church brought together a group of about 15 volunteers and band members last week to record Sunday's service. Although the church has been live streaming services for about a year, Williams said it was "weird" to see such a small group in a sanctuary that seats 850.

"We're trying to keep it as normal as possible," Williams said. "It's a little different [but] it seemed to work."

Father Wil Keith of Holy Cross-Faith Memorial Church had an even smaller group when he recorded his Sunday sermon on Saturday morning. Keith was joined in the sanctuary by his



Keith records the service on his iPhone.

wife and children. Keith chose 9 a.m. so the lighting would be similar to a regular service.

"We're keeping things familiar and consistent in times like this," Keith said.

Church members took videos of themselves reciting scripture at home and those recordings got spliced together with Keith's to form the finished product for Sunday.

The Rev. Will Malambri of Belin Memorial United Methodist Church said providing online services has had a "huge learning curve" for him and Belin's two other pastors, the Rev. Walter Cantwell and the Rev. Isaac Dusenberry.

All three participated in live

chat sessions on Facebook and YouTube on Sunday while the prerecorded service was being shown.

Malambri said watching people respond was "special."

"They really seemed to connect with the other people and with the pastors," Malambri said. "It felt like they weren't watching something passively, but that they were part of something pretty intimate given that there were screens dividing us."

Two church members who had been homebound with illness for awhile said they feel more connected to the church than they had in a long time, Malambri added.

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BEACHES

Access still open, but gatherings face crackdown

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

As the state was imposing new limits last week on public gatherings, the beach at Pawleys Island was filling up.

"It was like a busy Saturday in July," Police Chief Mike Fanning said. "Who knew we were going to have a heat wave in the middle of March and the schools would be closed?"

Cold and rainy weather this week helped with crowd control, but the weekend forecast calls for clear skies and highs in the upper 70s.

Gov. Henry McMaster emphasized this week that his executive order gives law enforcement the authority to limit gatherings to no more than two people. "This would apply to parties on the beach," he said at a press conference, but not in homes or businesses. "It requires discretion. It requires common sense."

Pawleys Island Town Council met Saturday in the gazebo at the island's Nature Park to adopt an emergency resolution that will allow it to operate while Town Hall is closed and conduct meetings online. The council members said they did not want to restrict access to the beach.

"I've gotten some phone calls and communication from people that are concerned about the amount of folks that are going on the beach," Mayor Brian Henry said. Some wanted the town to close the beach. One "was frustrated because he felt we have not acted yet."

Groups of 10 to 12 high school and college kids, gathered north of Pawleys Pier, Fanning said. The south end parking lot, the county's largest free public beach access, has been closed since October for use as a staging area for a beach renourishment project.

"I'm trying to look at this pragmatically and from a common-sense standpoint," Fanning said. "If you're in a family and you're renting a beach house, one, you've already exposed to one another under one roof, and I'm not going to tell you to separate as long as you're on the

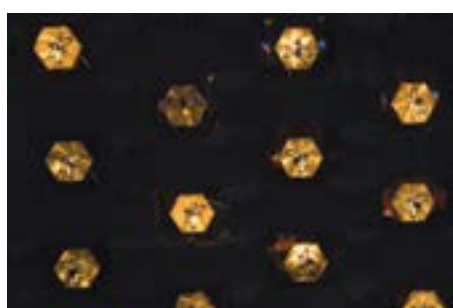
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Trevor Swenson/Coastal Observer

Beachgoers gather near Pawleys Pier last weekend.

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Step into the light: Brookgreen Gardens opens new outdoor exhibit as darkness falls.

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