

Message from the Mayor, April 23, 2020

Covid-19 Update: Township passes the 100 mark

The big topic of Coronavirus discussion nationally this week has been “When can we end the social distancing restrictions?” Some state capitals have had small demonstrations in favor of returning to “normal”. Some states have even begun to plan for more relaxed restrictions.

Locally, we see evidence of people who are tired of being cooped up in their homes. Our police have had to disperse groups congregating at the Shunpike Athletic Fields. Overflow crowds and hazardous parking have been a problem at the paved walking path around the perimeter of the Giralda Preserve

It is understandable to be impatient with the Governor's order to stay indoors. Luckily the weather this past week has been less than springlike, and the forecast for the coming week calls for more rain on most days.

They say every cloud has its silver lining, and that silver lining may literally be true if the clouds help keep people safely indoors.

Because our local numbers on Covid-19 infections show that it is clearly too soon to drop our guard.

Today, April 23, we exceeded 100 confirmed cases of Covid-19 in Chatham Township, which is a disheartening benchmark Health officials reported 7 new positive test results today, bringing our Township total to 103. As of yesterday, almost three quarters of those cases were at our two Long Term Care facilities – 30 at Chatham Hills and 45 at Juniper Village.

Sadly 4 new deaths of Township residents were reported today, bringing our total to 17. As of mid-week, 4 of those total deaths were residents of Chatham Hills, and 5 were residents of Juniper Village. It's almost certain those numbers are now higher at both LTC facilities, we just don't have the breakdown yet.

Behind each of these statistics is a person who will be missed. Clearly this is no time to let our guard down.

I'd like to share with you excerpts from a letter that was written on Tuesday of this week by a doctor at Morristown Hospital. It was shared by a friend and former neighbor of mine.

“Several of you have checked in on me and have asked for another update. Here it is. Just to warn you, it might be a little hard to read...

“The good news:

“The total number of Atlantic Health System patients with Covid 19 transitioned to recovery and discharged as of today, April 21, is 1,380. Every time a patient is discharged, a clip from the song by the Beatles "Here Comes the Sun" is played in the entire hospital on the overhead system. This is meant to attempt to uplift and make the hospital staff smile a little.

“The bad news:

“The media is making it sound like we're over the hump. We might be, but the death toll is skyrocketing.

“My current main role and what I do all day is place central lines and arterial lines in the sickest patients who get placed on the ventilators....it is a full time job. I worked 52 hours straight this weekend from Friday morning to Sunday late morning. Saturday morning, between 6am and 3pm, I placed nine central line/arterial line combinations on nine patients. One after another after another.

“One of those patients was my buddy and good friend, a tech at Morristown who I've known for five years. He contracted Covid six days ago, deteriorated, was placed on a ventilator, and went into kidney failure. (He) died Sunday night. He's not the only one I've known. A patient transporter died last week. One of our ER doctors died this weekend.

“Bottom line is if you get put on a ventilator, it is very hard to get these patients to breathe on their own again.

“At the end of the day, before I go home, I go to my quiet office and call the families of the patients who have died that day, anywhere from two to nine patients depending on the day. I tell them their loved one fought hard and we did everything we could. I answer their questions. I do the best I can over the phone.... It's horrible and depressing and has happened to regular people like us who are just trying to stay healthy.

“This message is just to give you a little window into the life of a healthcare worker and what we are all going through. You may read this and think, 'what can I do to help?' The best thing you can do is protect yourself and protect your families. Keep doing what you've been doing and avoid the temptation to let up because it's not safe. We are not out of the woods. Keep on being safe and staying home. Keep yelling at your parents when they try to break free and leave the house. If you have friends or know people that are going out, be a good friend and reason with them. Show them this post if you have to. Whatever it takes. Stay safe.”

We should all follow this good advice.

And here's some more practical advice, don't congregate at the Shunpike Fields. And if all the parking spots are taken at the Giralda Walking Path, take the hint and come back later when it's less crowded.

To end on a brighter note, if you're looking for something to do at home with your family I recommend you check out this week's bulletin from the Library of the Chathams. Its a wealth of information about programs and activities. There are story times and dance classes for little children; book groups and yoga for pre-teens and teens; and for adults there are tips on gardening, business, or just coffee and conversation if you need someone to talk with. And of course there are countless e-books you can borrow.

One thing we know for sure is that we are one week closer to the end of this pandemic than we were last week.

Please continue to be careful and stay healthy.

Michael Kelly

Chatham Township Mayor