

Message from the Mayor, May 4, 2020

Township enjoys, with care,
a weekend of relaxed rules

This past weekend was a key test as we all were asked to use personal caution and good judgment in our community's fight against the coronavirus pandemic. And by most accounts, the majority of us passed the test.

This was the weekend that county parks, state parks and golf courses re-opened. Chatham Township re-opened its public tennis courts and community garden and, for the second weekend, activated our compost area as many of us began our spring yardwork in earnest..

The careful relaxation of all these restrictions on outdoor activities came with cautions from state, county and local health officials, reminding us that many restrictions remain in effect and warning that bad behavior would not only expose people to an increased risk of infection, but also could result in a return to a more stringent shutdown.

It appears that most of us heeded those warnings. Bikers and joggers made good use of many roadways. The Loantaka and Giralda trails were crowded. More people should have brought facemasks and practiced safe social distancing at such popular facilities, but authorities on Monday were not reporting any need for further restrictions. At Chatham Township's municipal parks, police had to break up a basketball game at Shunpike Field, but otherwise reported good behavior as everyone avoided group activities. The re-opened tennis courts were greeted with enthusiasm and mostly good behavior. Reports are being investigated of tennis pros who were using the public courts to give private lessons.

Congratulations, everyone, for your consideration for each other as we carefully transition to what will be a new normal for the foreseeable future.

If we needed a reminder on why we can't let our guard down in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic, we got it on Monday. The latest report on the serious and too often tragic impact of the pandemic on our families and neighbors here in Chatham Township makes clear that the fight is not over.

Since last Thursday, we have had 7 new fatalities due to Covid-19, all of them associated with our local long-term care facilities. Since Thursday we also have 13 new confirmed cases of Covid-19 in the Township, 9 of them at our long-term care facilities. These latest figures bring us to a terrible total of 25 deaths and 123 confirmed cases of Covid-19.

This is an uptick from the previous week when reports totaled 1 death and 7 new confirmed cases. Health officials caution that these numbers, while accurate, are not current. It can take days for test results to be known, and some of these illnesses and deaths undoubtedly happened days earlier and are only now making it into the state data base. Many people who have the virus but are asymptomatic never get tested. Many who were added to the list of confirmed cases weeks ago have since recovered.

But while exact numbers may be unknown, the message remains clear. As we carefully relax some restrictions it becomes even more important for all of us to abide by the safeguards required by executive order.

All residents must maintain safe social distancing of at least six feet from each other, wear masks in public and wash hands frequently. We should avoid touching our face, cover coughs and sneezes, stay home when ill, and contact our physician if symptoms begin to escalate.

And remember that many restrictions remain in place. Parks are open for passive use only. No group sports are allowed. Playgrounds, restrooms, clubhouses and buildings remain closed. Parking lots at state parks are limited to 50 percent capacity to avoid overuse.

Please follow these common sense guidelines to avoid exposing ourselves and others to infection. Enjoy these new opportunities to get outdoors, but be careful, exercise good judgment and stay safe.

Michael Kelly

Chatham Township Mayor