



# Officials praise Grant County residents’ response to COVID

By Sean Douglas

As they have for the past few weeks, multiple Grant County officials held their weekly COVID-19 press conference at Sunnycrest Baptist Church this past Wednesday, updating the community on the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on Marion and surrounding areas.

Grant County EMA Director Bob Jackson provided insight into a typical day at the EMA. Each day, Jackson and his team review the previous day’s plan to assess effectiveness and devise methods to achieve higher levels of preparedness in the days and weeks to come.

Jackson also praised the people of Grant County for maintaining social distancing protocols. As a result of this adherence, the EMA has been able to stockpile crucial supplies in case the number of cases would surge in the near future.

“Grant County is well protected. We are well prepared,” Jackson said. “Social distancing has bought us time to prepare our PPE. We’ve made great strides there. We are better protected and better prepared for a second wave should that come or anything in the future that may come our way.”

At this time, he said, there have been no talks of lifting any restrictions currently in place. Travel is still limited to essential business opening, and all non-essential businesses remain closed until further notice.

“We’ll have conversations with commissioners, the health department, and the CDC,” Jackson said. “A lot of people will help us make those decisions when it is appropriate and when it is safe to do so.”

Grant County Commissioner Mark Bardsley echoed Jackson’s sentiment, stating that the community’s adherence to Indiana’s social distancing guidelines have already helped to save a plethora of lives.

“On behalf of the Grant County Board of Commissioners, as well as elected officials throughout Grant County, we thank you for your continued support in observing the Governor’s stay-at-home order that has been issued during this pandemic crisis,” Bardsley said. “Grant County’s vigilance and early reaction to this disaster has actually



Robert Jackson

helped us reduce the transmission of the virus in Grant County.”

Furthermore, he encouraged the public for continued vigilance. As of Monday, April 20, there have been 78 reported cases in Grant County, with three deaths. There also have been 275 tests administered. In Indiana, 11,686 positive cases have been reported, with 569 deaths. More than 64,600 tests have been administered.

“We are seeing a difference because of the physical distancing that we are doing and because of all the proper hygiene we are [utilizing,]” Bardsley said. “We are making informed decisions for the future. We are not going to base anything on fear. We are going to do it on facts. Travel is still restricted. We are asking folks to stay sheltered in place. We encourage you to continue doing what you have been doing.”

Marion Mayor Jess Alumbaugh provided an update on public transportation. At this time, the buses are still running across the city, but only for essential tasks and with 24-hour notice. Essential tasks include grocery shopping, medical appointments, and trips to the pharmacy for medication.

Transportation is still running the buses, but only for essential tasks and only on a 24-hour notice. Pharmacy, grocery, or medical appointments.

City government officials are still being asked to work from home and will return to the office until it is deemed safe to do so, according to Alumbaugh.

“Social distancing is the key, so we are trying to adhere to that at City Hall and throughout city government,” Alumbaugh said.

Alumbaugh also encouraged citizens to support local Grant County restaurants with takeout orders, while also asking for continued prayer for frontline

workers and public safety officials.

“I want to thank the citizens of Marion for adhering to this stay-at-home initiative,” Alumbaugh said. “We know this is the best avenue to beat this virus. If we do that, we’ll get through this.”

Marion Superintendent Dr. Brad Lindsay reminded the community that the weekly food drive at Justice will continue every Wednesday from 4 pm to 6 pm. Last week, volunteers handed out 35,000 meals to Marion’s citizens.

“I’m so proud of our community coming together for this fight,” Lindsay said. “We are up for the fight. We are going to fight together. When our community fights, we win, and that’s what we are doing right now.”

Cullen Gibson, a 21-year veteran at Colonial Oaks in Marion, brought the community up to speed on how COVID-19 has affected living at the facility.

“This pandemic has hit us and challenged us beyond any type of flu or virus we have ever experienced in our facilities,” Gibson said.

Colonial Oaks, and its parent company, TLC Management, which has 17 facilities in Indiana and Florida have established isolated areas for those affected by the COVID-19 virus.

Unfortunately, Colonial Oaks has had to utilize the isolation chamber, as one of their residents tested positive for the virus just the day before.

“We just got word as of yesterday that we had a resident test positive for COVID-19,” Gibson said. “We acted quickly once we found out the test was positive, and we moved this lovely resident into our isolated area in our facility.”

Health care workers are the front line of defense against this deadly disease,

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# GM workers start making ventilators

By Alan Miller

More than 300 workers from Marion and Kokomo have begun assembling the first of 30,000 ventilators for the federal government as part of a joint venture announced March 20 between General Motors and Washington-based Ventec Life Systems.

The ventilators are being assembled in a three-story building at the former General Motors component plant in Kokomo. That facility was chosen because, unlike most car assembly factories, it has the type of clean room needed for making medical devices.

“In less than 30 days, General Motors has taken a decommissioned building and turned it into a bustling assembly plant,” GM Communications Manager Stephanie Jentgen said in an interview on WBAT Radio. “The building formerly housed GM’s engineering resource center.”

The workforce eventually will grow to more than 1,000 men and women, including people who already work at the GM plants in Marion and Kokomo as well as new hires from the two communities. Jentgen said about 1,500 people have applied for the jobs.

“We’ve had a wonderful response to our call for workers. The applicants range in age from the early

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**Stephanie Jentgen**  
**GM Communications Manager**

20s to the late 60s,” she said. “We are seeking people who are willing to work each day and to work long hours. Above all, we are seeking people who want to make a difference.”

Jentgen said several salaried employees from the Marion GM plant have volunteered to help train assembly line workers in Kokomo.

The first 600 ventilators will be shipped by the end of April, according to a GM news release. Almost half of the order will be filled by the end of June, and the full order will be completed by the end of August. GM will have the capacity to build more ventilators after August if needed.

GM has a \$489.4 million contract with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to deliver the 30,000 ventilators to the Strategic National Stockpile. Jentgen said GM has been told that part of the first shipment will be distributed to hospitals in the Gary, Indiana, and Chicago areas.

Automotive News reported that the first ventilators, called the V+Pro, are

being built mostly by hand because of the limited time to automate the process and the urgent need to deliver the devices to hospitals treating COVID-19 patients.

The V+Pro, a more limited version of Ventec’s multi-function VOCSN ventilator, is a portable device that can run on battery power. It can be used in field hospitals and other non-traditional venues that don’t have supplies of pressurized air and other normal hospital infrastructure, according to a GM press release.

Jentgen said the V+Pro has 400 parts, compared to the 700 parts in the VOCSN ventilator. “Some of the parts are the size of the screwdrivers you use to repair eyeglasses,” she said. “The assembly line workers often are overwhelmed initially, but after the first day they are telling themselves, ‘We can do this’.”

To help protect people working at the Kokomo plant, extensive screening, cleaning and other CDC-recommended procedures will be in place, GM said.