

Dealing with COVID while behind bars

You and I can hide from COVID-19, that first great global scourge of the 21st Century. The reality is we can live like hermits in our houses or huts, by and large remain free of contact with any other human being if we so choose. Some have, some haven't. And so far a quarter-million Americans have been carried to their graves, with more to come.

But what of those in jail, those with absolutely no control over the circumstances of their lives at the moment? Talking about prisoners, inmates, convicts — and yes, those held but convicted of nothing and awaiting trial for something.

About two-and-a-half million men and women and a few children are being held — incarcerated — in this country, which, not incidentally, is the highest percentage of jailed population in the civilized world.

While the rest of us deal with daily work, school, shopping and how many people to have over for Thanksgiving dinner, these people are focused on how to stay alive inside a system being ravaged by the pandemic.

Listen to this from The New York Times on Sunday:

“Like the nation overall, U.S. correctional facilities are experiencing record spikes in COVID infections this fall. During the week of Nov. 17, there were 13,657 new infections reported across the state and federal prison systems. The previous week saw 13,676 new cases. These are by far the highest weekly tolls reported since the pandemic began. With winter descending, the situation

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A MOMENT
Ed Breen



threatens to grow bleaker still.

“The American penal system is a perfect breeding ground for the virus. Squabbles over mask wearing and social distancing are essentially moot inside overcrowded facilities, many of them old and poorly ventilated, with tight quarters and hygiene standards that are difficult to maintain. Uneven testing, inadequate medical resources and the constant churn of staff members, visitors and inmates further speed transmission. Crueler still, inmates suffer disproportionately from comorbidities, such as high blood pressure and asthma, putting them at an elevated risk.”

Now, before you come pounding on the door, yes, I know these are people who did bad things, greater bad things and lesser bad things, but scoundrels nonetheless. And I will tell you right now, I have no solutions.

Some states and jurisdictions are doing simple and

seemingly sane things like releasing people who are in for short times and are nearing the end of their sentences. Is another two months in the slammer going to rehabilitate a nickel-and-dime pot dealer? No, get him out of here. Same for the guy who went joyriding on a stolen motorcycle or got a few months behind on support payment.

There are thousands of people who need to be in prison to do the time for the crime or to keep them away from the rest of us. No quarrel with that. But maybe, just maybe, by freeing up some space we create a little social distance where it is most difficult to find.

And I have a real problem with leaving to the ravages of COVID those who are there only because the prosecutor and defense lawyers can't get around to making their case. There are hundreds, thousands of such people caught in the tangled web that is the criminal justice system.

Right here in Grant County, a study last spring found that, on average, more than half of the people lodged in the county jail have yet to be convicted of that for which they have been charged. Grant County seems to be doing fairly well on protecting inmates, but lodging the unconvicted seems unnecessary.

The shape and scope of the devastation remains difficult to pin down. But what we know is heartbreaking. As of last week more than 196,600 COVID cases had been reported in state and federal prisons. More than 1,450 of those prisoners had died. The case rates among inmates are more than four times as high as those of the general public. And the death rate is more than double.

And there are the keepers of the incarcerated. It's their job; they have to be there every day. But they do get to go home at night. More than 685,000 of them: Guards, nurses, chaplains, cooks.

There have been more than 45,000 COVID cases and 98 deaths among staff members thus far. That's three times the rate of everybody else.



Dawn Cornell (with scissors) cuts the ribbon in front of True Envy Boutique on Thursday afternoon. Photo by Sean Douglas

True Envy has ribbon cutting

By Sean Douglas

Two years ago, Dawn Conwell had a dream to start her own business and work in the world of women's fashion.

On Thursday afternoon, two years of hard work and perseverance and several subsequent moves, True Envy Boutique was officially christened in a ribbon cutting ceremony at its storefront location in downtown Marion.

Conwell began the business in her home in late November of 2018. She has always had a passion for fashion and felt that a fashion boutique would fill a big need for the city of Marion.

“I started it because it was fun,” Conwell said. “I enjoy doing it. I like seeing the looks on the women's faces and people's faces when they try something on that fits really well. I love clothes and fashion. A lot of the bigger stores are closing, and we don't have as many options here in Marion, so I really felt it was something that the community needed, and I wanted to fill that gap.”

Over the remainder of 2018 and the majority of 2019, True Envy Boutique's popularity skyrocketed, so much so that a change of venue was necessary. In

early October of 2019, Conwell moved into her first store at the Boston Hill Center, starting out small to see community response would be like.

While at Boston Hill Center, True Envy Boutique continued to grow in a positive manner. Conwell and her team worked with customers both local and around the country, and once again, expansion was necessary.

Just last month, True Envy Boutique moved to its current location on Third Street, and despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Conwell's business continues to thrive.

“We thought it was the perfect time to expand,” Conwell said. “We have a storefront, and we have a lot of options for live sales and curbside pickup if it came to that again. It has a big city feel, but a small-town charm. We are really excited.”

True Envy Boutique sells a plethora of items, including Kancan brand jeans in every style and color, Amber Blend fragrances, handcrafted jewelry, leggings, dresses, shoes, and many others types of casual and formal wear. All the items sold at True Envy Boutique are on par with the latest trends and fashion.

and Conwell updates her wares to keep up with the ever-changing fashion landscape.

According to Conwell, everything sells well, but the Kancan jeans are her most popular item.

Additionally, Conwell serves her customers in a variety of ways. Whether it's in-store, pickup, or delivery, True Envy Boutique goes above and beyond to serve all of their customer's needs.

“When we were out of my house, we became known for our live sales, and my husband and I do those together,” Conwell said. “People really enjoyed those, so we brought those back during the pandemic. We do delivery. We do pickup. And we ship across the United States. We will ship anything.”

As True Envy Boutique continues to grow in the years to come, Conwell is excited to serve the city of Marion for the long haul.

“We will continue to listen to our customers,” Conwell concluded. “We want to continue to provide individual customer service. We want to get what people are looking for and still stay on trend. We just go above and beyond in customer service, and that's what we want to continue to do.”

COVID prompts parade cancellation

The City of Marion's Walkway of Lights Parade did not take place this Saturday due to the spike in COVID-19 cases.

Mayor Jess Alumabugh has been seeking advice from Grant County Public Health Officer, Dr. David Moore. The decision was made today after further discussions with Dr. Moore

and the Grant County Health Dept.

“This is absolutely the last thing we want to happen, but unfortunately, the numbers are rapidly increasing,” Alumabugh said. “My main concern is the health of our community and both Dr. Moore and I agree this is the safest thing to do.”

The City of Marion and Walkway of Lights Committee still encourage folks to visit the Walkway of Lights display this season. The display was lit at 6pm on Saturday, Nov. 21st, and will continue to be open from 6–10 pm each evening until the end of the year.

SUDOKU

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Level: Intermediate

Here's How It Works:

Sudoku puzzles are formatted as a 9x9 grid, broken down into nine 3x3 boxes. To solve a sudoku, the numbers 1 through 9 must fill each row, column and box. Each number can appear only once in each row, column and box. You can figure out the order in which the numbers will appear by using the numeric clues already provided in the boxes. The more numbers you name, the easier it gets to solve the puzzle!

Fun By The Numbers

Like puzzles? Then you'll love sudoku. This mind-bending puzzle will have you hooked from the moment you square off, so sharpen your pencil and put your sudoku savvy to the test!