

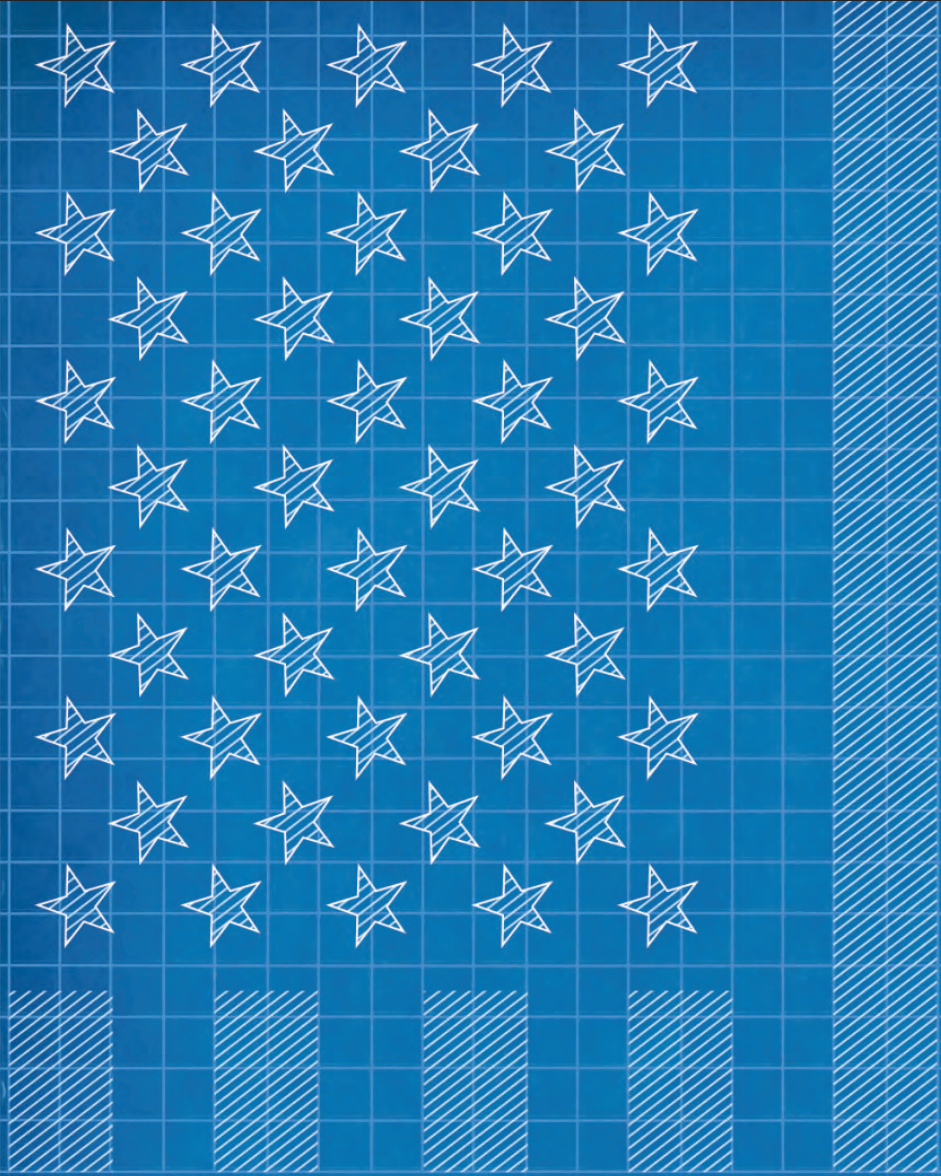
The Palm Beach Post

REAL NEWS STARTS HERE

Sunday, May 31, 2020

palmbeachpost.com

\$4



REBUILD AMERICA



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HEALTH CARE

Our way back to the way we were



Frank Cerabino

It will take longer than we think, and we may find virus-time changes worth keeping

The breaking part was easy. One day the world was spinning on its axis much in the way it always has. Let's call it Wednesday, March 11. And the next day, there was no more NBA basketball season. Actor Tom Hanks was quarantined in Australia. And plans were being raced into place all over the U.S. to close schools, businesses, and public gathering spots because of the undeniable march of this new virus.

The breaking part was easy. Within a matter of days, remnants of normalcy had slipped away, creating a before-and-after shattering of time.

Putting together those broken pieces — well, that's not so easy. Or as *Hunger Games* author Suzanne Collins once put it: "It takes ten times as long to put yourself back together as it does to fall apart." Ten times longer? That sounds like a bargain.

So now, more than two months after that shattering point, how will Palm Beach County, like the rest of America, put ourselves back together? And what will this new re-glued version of us look like?

Will we be damaged goods, like a reconstructed broken vase with its old fault lines too plainly visible? Or will we be a new something that's worthy in surprising ways?

"The world breaks everyone, and afterward, some are strong in the broken places," novelist Ernest Hemingway wrote in *A Farewell to Arms*.

Maybe that will be us. Strong in the broken places.

When all those things we consider a big part of our lives gradually resume, they won't be the same. That's for sure — at least until an effective coronavirus vaccine is developed and administered.

But maybe, the way we fill the void during the interim has enlightened us to new possibilities by showing us new worlds that were available, but unimagined.

See REBUILDING, A23

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We're here for you.



Your telemedical doctor will see you now

The screen appointment is here to stay, experts say, and in-person visits will prioritize cleanliness

By Wayne Washington
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

When it comes to hospitals and medical care, coronavirus-inspired changes in American life — from masks to temperature checks to telemedicine — are here to stay, experts say.

In many instances, patients won't even see a doctor or nurse in person. They will get medical advice and guidance on a screen in an expanding field known as telemedicine.

"The practice of medicine has changed and changed quickly," said Dr. James Heron, an internal medicine specialist in Atlantis, a member of the Palm Beach County Medical Society's COVID-19 Task Force.

Going to the doctor's office or hospital

Before coronavirus, American patients could make an appointment with their doctor or, if they felt acutely ill, drive to a hospital emergency room or call for transport to one.

Things won't be that simple in post-COVID-19 America, medical experts say.

"Before they come into the office, (patients) might have to answer a questionnaire," said Dr. Brent Schillinger, a dermatologist in Delray Beach and past president of the Palm Beach County Medical Society. "If people are sick, they might be asked to stay in their car."

Doctor's offices will first want to know if the would-be patient has an infectious condition. If the patient could have something like coronavirus, the doctor's office likely will suggest a specific time for an appointment — a time when the incoming patient can be separated from others. The doctor's office might provide care via telephone, again to eliminate the risk of infection spread.

For patients who go straight to a hospital, that experience will be different, too, medical



Orthopedic surgeon Dr. Ross G. Stone examines patient Shirley Letourneau in the breezeway outside his office in Atlantis. [LANNIS WATERS/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]

Changes coming to medicine

- More telemedicine or doctors on a screen
- Acceptance of face masks, constant cleansing
- Heavy presence of hand sanitizer
- Virtual learning for docs-to-be

experts say.

Medical staff will move quickly to determine if a patient might have an infectious condition that requires isolation. And complaints of respiratory distress probably will move a patient up on the priority ladder.

"Before, if you said you had chest pains, they moved you in right away," Schillinger said. "There would be worry that it might be a heart attack. Now,

if you have respiratory symptoms, you will be moved into a secure area very quickly."

Medical training and procedures

Patients in a doctor's office or a hospital should expect to be told to wear a mask. It won't be a request, Schillinger said.

Doctor's offices and hospitals will be cleaned more regularly and more thoroughly, medical experts say. Hand sanitizer will be readily available.

Already, training for doctors and nurses has been altered by the pandemic, according to Dr. Terry Adirim, a pediatrician who is senior associate dean for clinical affairs at Florida Atlantic University's Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine.

Medical and nursing students will get less of their education in

hospital settings, Adirim said, adding that virtual learning and simulation will become a bigger part of a student's education.

"Simulation was already part of medical education, but I think it will take on a more prominent role because it's safer," Adirim said.

Hospitals would save on precious personal protective equipment, and, with fewer people near patients, the risk of spreading infection would be reduced.

Increased reliance on telemedicine

Just as nursing and medical students will lean more heavily on virtual learning, telemedicine will become an increasingly important aspect of care, medical experts say.

Dr. Joseph Kvedar, a Boston

dermatologist who is president-elect of the American Telemedicine Association, said telemedicine has taken root over the past couple of months.

"Patients seem happy with it," Kvedar said. "Doctors are warming to it. Pre-op visits can be done this way. Post-op care."

Heron, however, said some doctors are still not thrilled by the idea of providing medical care remotely, calling it "a very sterile and distant process."

Kvedar said not all care can or should be provided remotely.

"This isn't about forcing anything down people's throat," he said. "This is about giving people access to care. I think the genie is out of the bottle on this one, and we're not going back."

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For medicine, challenges to adapt ahead

Lessons from pandemic will shape future in US

Adrianna Rodriguez
USA TODAY

The health care landscape has drastically changed since the coronavirus pandemic arrived in the United States.

Doctors restructured office waiting rooms and now greet patients daring enough to keep regular visits wearing masks. Hospitals cut elective surgeries, limited visitors and scrambled to provide protection for workers. Tests and annual checkups have been postponed.

Dr. George Sledge, professor and chief of the Division of Oncology at Stanford University Medical Center, said criteria to monitor patients have had to adapt. "Many of our protocols got way too specific and way too impractical and (the pandemic) has allowed us to reset a lot of those," he said.

Precautions impacting the way most Americans access basic health care are expected to last. Without a vaccine — not expected even optimistically until sometime next year — the risk of transmitting the virus that causes COVID-19 remains high. So what will the future of medicine look like as the U.S. adapts to the new pandemic landscape?

Telehealth and telemedicine

While telemedicine is technically nothing new to health care providers, experts say it has exploded since the pandemic began.

"For years, we've talked about the promise of telemedicine and its opportunities," said Mark Holmes, professor at University of North Carolina Gillings School of Global Public Health. "But what the last two months has shown us is that it could really be a game changer."

Dr. Lisa Yerian, chief improvement officer at the Cleveland Clinic, has seen the growth firsthand. Prior to COVID-19,



Virtual health services are possible in many American communities. GETTY IMAGES

the clinic had an average of 3,400 virtual visits per month. That number shot up to about 200,000 visits in April.

The coronavirus pandemic has forced health care providers to iron out kinks in telemedicine, Holmes said. The Trump administration has broadened Medicare coverage and payment of virtual services as hospitals educate their patients and health care workers on how to use it.

"There was a time when many people were very reluctant to use virtual technologies," Yerian said. "But more and more people are becoming more comfortable."

Not everyone, however, can enjoy the convenience of virtual visits, Holmes said. Broadband in rural communities continues to be an obstacle.

Rural hospitals closing

Rural hospitals have been teetering on the tight-wire of financial fragility for about a decade, said Michael Topchik,

director of the Chartis Center for Rural Health. The pandemic could be what sends them over. A study conducted by the health care consulting firm revealed 453 rural hospitals — nearly 25% in the country — are vulnerable to closure.

"Things were bad and they've gotten way worse," Topchik said. "One in three hospitals were operating in red. Now it's almost one in two."

Elective procedures largely put on hold since the pandemic make up the majority of business for rural hospitals. According to Topchik, 79% of rural hospital volume and revenue come from these procedures.

"That's a crushing blow," he said.

Emergency room volume, another source of revenue for rural hospitals, has plunged. While Topchik said rural hospitals are seeing COVID-19 patients, those patients not staying for long. Most of them are stabilized at these smaller hospitals and then transported to bigger ones with more resources. It's always been that way, he said.

Due to the loss of income, the Chartis study found, rural hospitals are operating at a median of 33 days cash on hand. Hospitals in 14 states are operating at zero to 19 days.

Rural hospitals have long relied on bipartisan support. The Rural Emergency Acute Care Hospital (REACH) Act and, more recently, the CARES Act, provided some relief to small health care providers. Additionally, the federal government decided this month to send \$22 billion to rural hospitals and those hardest hit by COVID-19.

"Every available dollar possible should go to rural hospitals as it will be a much larger dollar in three to six months," said Jimmy Lewis, CEO of HomeTown Health, which represents rural hospitals in Georgia.

Topchik says more can be done. Reversing cuts made to federal spending and bad debt reimbursements, and creating incentives could help.

Hospital preparedness

Holmes said providers were not surprised by the coronavirus pandemic but were unprepared. "The issue is that it costs money to prepare," he said.

Holmes hopes the pandemic has taught society the value of preparedness and stockpiling personal protective equipment in case of any emergency, whether it's a pandemic or a hurricane. He also underscored the need for a national data system.

Dr. Lisa Carey, oncologist at the University of North Carolina Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center, highlighted the importance of testing in future pandemics.

"We've had four pandemics in the last 20 years and three of them (came from a) coronavirus," Carey said. "These are lessons learned for not just this but future infections."

"And there will be others."

Contributing: Jayne O'Donnell, USA TODAY; Associated Press.



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Keeping you and your family safe and healthy has always been our priority. That has not changed. In this time of uncertainty, it is vital to take care of your health. We do understand there is concern about COVID-19 and we want you to know that we have strict policies and procedures in place to keep our patients safe. We have appropriate testing for COVID-19 with dedicated units – a separate and safe environment. If you find yourself in need of medical care, please do not hesitate. We are open and safely caring for all patients. **For more information, please visit our hospital websites.**



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Florida’s health care reboot has been slow going

Health care is a key component of Florida’s economy and quality of life, and the clamor to restore elective procedures has emphasized both

By Zac Anderson
zac.anderson@heraldtribune.com

Florida’s medical providers are ramping back up after nearly two months of only offering essential services to keep space and supplies available for treating coronavirus patients.

But while elective procedures are OK again, industry groups are advising hospitals, doctors offices, dentists and other medical providers to proceed cautiously and keep patient and provider safety at the forefront, even as they emphasize that health care facilities are safe.

Health care is a key component of Florida’s economy and quality of life, and the clamor to restore elective procedures has emphasized both. There are concerns that patients have been forgoing care that may not have been essential but is still important, and that medical providers have been shedding jobs as revenues plummet.

Getting the industry back into full swing will take time, though, and the state’s health care system could operate much differently for the foreseeable future.

The Florida Medical Association put out a 10-page guide to help doctor’s offices navigate the new reality of providing medical care in a world where the coronavirus is still spreading, and any patient could be a potential carrier. It advises to go slowly, with a phased approach and continue using telehealth whenever possible.



Personnel from Longboat Key Fire Rescue Department, Sarasota County Fire Department, Venice Fire Department, North Port Fire Department, Manatee County Fire Departments and Manatee County EMS held an appreciation ceremony last month at Sarasota Memorial Hospital for doctors, nurses and hospital staff who have been working around the clock during the COVID-19 pandemic. Gov. Ron DeSantis is allowing hospitals around the state to begin elective procedures again. [HERALD-TRIBUNE STAFF PHOTO / MIKE LANG]

Proper personal protective equipment is important, both for health providers and patients. The FMA recommends that all patients wear masks.

The group’s tip sheet provides other guidelines, such as spacing appointments so patients aren’t waiting together, limiting who can accompany patients to the office and pre-screening each patient for coronavirus symptoms before they come in. The American Dental Association has issued similar guidelines.

“The precautions being taken now as far as spacing patients physically, spacing appointments in time, wearing masks, are good safety measures, especially in areas where there are a lot of cases,” said FMA President Dr. Ronald Giffler. “Eventually some of that will return back to normal.”

Hospitals taking precautions

Florida hospitals are taking similar precautions.

“A lot of this is creating a brand new way of life — because that’s really where we are at this point — on how you operate these facilities,” said Florida Hospital Association Interim President Crystal Stickle.

The FMA and FHA pushed to end the ban on elective procedures. Patients with serious medical conditions such as diabetes and heart disease haven’t been getting needed care, Giffler said.

“Many patients that have serious chronic diseases that require visits to the doctor have not been going to the doctor... and this has really not been good,” Giffler said, adding: “People without symptoms that aren’t absolutely crushing are just toughing it out at home when they could really benefit from medical care.”

The economic impact of the ban on elective procedures also was significant.

Florida has more than 300 hospitals, more than 80,000 doctors and more than 14,000 dentists, according to state

Florida Medical Association reopening guidelines

The Florida Medical Association published a 10-page primer for physicians on reopening medical practices. Among the recommendations:

- Phase in the reopening “so that the practice may quickly identify and address any practical challenges presented.”
- Screen patients for coronavirus symptoms before they visit.
- Adopt new safety measures such as mandating patients wear masks, spacing out appointments to limit patient contact and limiting who can attend appointments with patients.
- Protect health care workers by ensuring there is adequate personal protective equipment, screening employees for illness and minimizing contact between employees.

data. These medical providers and their employees, from nurses to dental hygienists and receptionists, were hit hard by Gov. Ron DeSantis’ executive order.

Some doctor’s offices and dentists closed completely, while others operated in limited capacity along with hospitals. Layoffs and furloughs followed.

“This is a very serious effect, not just on doctors and patients but on the whole state economy, when so many people are out of work,” Giffler said.

The push to allow health care facilities to operate at full capacity intensified after it became clear that there was no immediate threat of the coronavirus overwhelming the health care system. Concerns about a lack of personal protective equipment also have eased.

“What we are finding is some of the larger supply chain disruptions, some of the supply chain issues we had early on... have, by and large, gotten a lot better,” Stickle said.

About a third of the state’s hospital beds currently are empty statewide, and there also are plenty of intensive care unit beds available right now.

Still slow but growing

DeSantis lifted the elective procedure ban on May 4.

But many doctors’ offices are still operating well below capacity.

“It’s a little slower getting started than you would think,” Giffler said.

That’s partly because it takes time to get the staff and supplies in place, but many patients also are still reluctant to visit health care providers out of coronavirus concerns. Giffler expects that to continue for weeks.

His message to patients: “Don’t be afraid to get the care you’ve been getting; if you have a chronic condition and you have been under a physician’s care don’t skip your appointment.”

“We have to get the message out,” he added. “It’s important because people’s health is at stake.”

Hospitals also continue to see lower patient volumes and have been working to convince Floridians that it is safe to get medical treatment.

“We are really trying to spread the message that hospitals of thoughtfully taken precautions, hospitals have prepared,” Stickle said, adding: “No patient should feel concerned about going to the hospital if they feel they need to seek out emergency medical attention.”



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As a community health center, FoundCare was the first in Palm Beach County to offer drive-through COVID-19 testing. Mobile pop-up testing sites, manned by FoundCare doctors, nurses, and staff, have been set-up in underserved communities in the County including Belle Glade, Delray Beach, Pahokee, Riviera Beach, Boynton Beach, West Palm Beach, and Lake Worth. A large testing event was also held for the Guatemalan-Maya Center where over 350 people were tested. This would not be made possible without the support from the Quantum Foundation and our other valuable partners. In addition to our mobile testing efforts, FoundCare continues testing at our Palm Springs location every Wednesday by appointment. Testing will be offered for free to those in our community as long as a steady flow of testing kits and PPE (personal protective equipment) is available.

In addition to testing, adult and pediatric medical care, infectious disease care, behavioral health, and case management services are all ongoing. Many of these services have been offered using telehealth technology to keep patients and staff safe. In-person visits have been limited and are occurring as necessary. Patients with chronic diseases who do not have access to a computer or smart phone can

still be seen virtually in the parking lot of our health center. Pharmacy services have remained open and free prescription delivery has been offered to all FoundCare patients.

Women's health services, which will soon include mammography, are now being offered at FoundCare.

To better serve our patients, FoundCare is working on opening its 7th site located on Okeechobee Boulevard. This new health center will offer geriatric, pediatric, and adult medicine, and an on-site pharmacy. These services will reach those in Westgate as well as Century Village. FoundCare will be launching a capital campaign that will include naming opportunities. We invite you to make a pledge. For more information, please call 561-472-9160, Ext: 143.

In 2019, FoundCare served 18,725 patients. Prior to COVID-19, FoundCare was on track to reach more than 20,000 patients in 2020. As the economic crisis continues to fuel unemployment, more people will seek FoundCare for help. As a federally qualified community health center, no one is turned away regardless of their ability to pay. We need your help now more than ever.

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will not be possible without your support.***

**Donate today to help us win the battle against COVID-19.
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‘Rebuilding America’ chronicles the reopening — and resolve — of the US



Maribel Wadsworth
President of news for the USA TODAY Network and publisher of USA TODAY

Kevin Gentzel
Chief revenue officer USA TODAY Network/Gannett

The reopening of America is a story of businesses adapting to a new normal, one where customers are at least 6 feet apart, and everyone is wearing masks. It’s a story of car dealerships launching virtual showrooms and real estate agents conducting more home tours and other services via video.

It’s a story of restaurants adding more space between tables, expanding outdoor seating and increasing their cleaning protocols to begin opening their doors with limited capacity. And it’s the story of how our schools, our favorite downtown shops and the country’s largest retailers are preparing for an economic reawakening that is spreading across the nation as restrictions are being lifted.

It’s a story that can only be uniquely told by the USA TODAY Network’s more than 260 local newsrooms across the nation and our flagship USA TODAY. The story is different depending on where you live and what stage of reopening your state is currently in.

But in many ways, the story is the same: As each community works to rebuild its economy, it will mean changes, challenges and opportunities to chart a new course post-pandemic.

Today, we introduce “Rebuilding America,” a bold and ambitious project that chronicles the country’s reopening through a dozen key economic drivers – from real estate and the auto industry to



Hawley Antique Exchange manager Angela Gayes Soden turns the store’s open sign in Hawley, Pa., on May 22. Many businesses are opening for the first time since the COVID-19 shutdown in March. CHRISTOPHER DOLAN/AP

higher education, travel and tourism.

For this project, journalists across the country examined both the national landscape of how these industries are navigating this uncertainty to how local businesses are reopening their doors safely. In conjunction with that strong independent reporting, our sales staff worked closely with more than 2,700 advertisers to help them craft their messages.

We have a deep commitment to telling our communities’ stories and to supporting local businesses.

In March, we launched Support Local, a platform designed to aid local businesses during this challenging time through gift card purchases and other measures. We recently added Volunteer Match to the site to connect willing volunteers to aid communities impacted by COVID-19.

We know this is not a story that will be told in one day. We’ve been here since before this pandemic started, and we’ll be here long after it is over. We hope you’ll join in the journey of “Rebuilding America” as we all work together to build toward a new future.

Please keep reading. Keep supporting local businesses. And know that we are in this together.



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Baptist Health

A letter from Brian E. Keeley

Now, more than ever, we are ready to continue caring for you.

Over the past several months our community has faced unprecedented challenges. As the coronavirus pandemic has changed the way we live, one thing has always remained constant — and that’s the incredible commitment and dedication shown by our caregivers and support staff each day.

As much of the world stayed home, sheltering in place to try to stop the spread of the virus, our team, and other healthcare workers around the globe, went to work. In this time of uncertainty, South Florida needed us more than ever — and we were honored to serve your needs. Through it all, we’ve been inspired by our community — who has shown us support in so many ways — including caravans, food deliveries, notes of encouragement and more. We are humbled by your gratitude. And, we’ve been inspired by our patients — who have fought with us against this invisible enemy. Each new hospital discharge gives us renewed hope that together, as a community, we will get through this.

Just as we responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are ready to care for our community as we move forward with enhanced safety measures and new processes designed with your health in mind.

We have now resumed elective surgeries and procedures, and we have increased safety measures to prevent the spread of infection and protect our employees and patients. These include: temperature checks and increased screenings, mandatory masks, limiting visitors, enhanced cleaning and a new, contactless registration process. We have also made changes to our physical spaces, such as ensuring the proper distancing in our lobbies, as well as installing acrylic partitions in certain areas and adding more hand-sanitizing stations. For more information on these measures, please visit **BaptistHealth.net/coronavirus**.

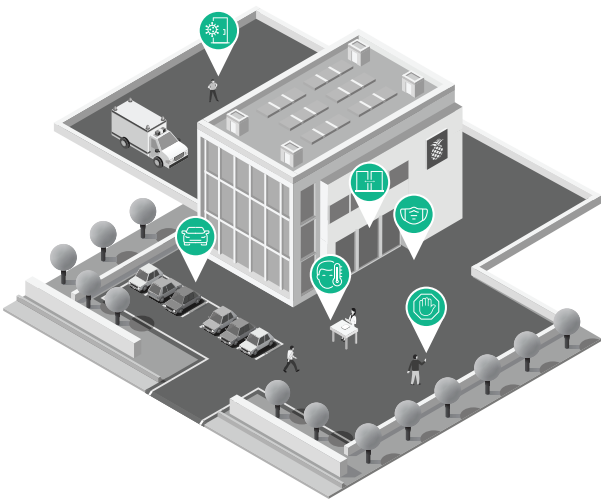
Rest assured that we will continue to take extra steps in order to protect you, and when you need care — we are ready to help, whether in person or virtually via our Baptist Health Care On Demand App. If you have had to postpone any procedures or treatments, please check with your doctor about rescheduling, or call us at **833-MyBaptist (692-2784)**. We are honored to care for you.

Thank you, and be well,

Brian E. Keeley
President and Chief Executive Officer
Baptist Health South Florida

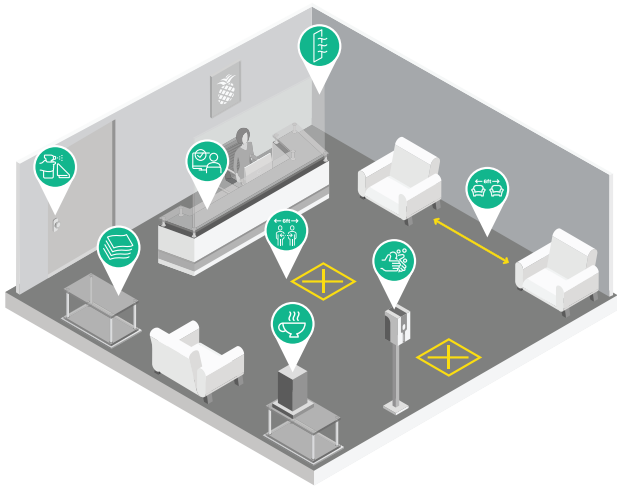
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-  Touch-free automatic sliding doors
-  COVID-19 Patients Treated in Separate Area

Lobby Experience



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-  Contactless registration
-  Social-Distance floor markings
-  Chairs spaced out
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-  Coffee & snack service suspended
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KEEP CARING. LIVE HEALTHY. STAY STRONG.



Well-armed to help you get your business back on track



William Barker



Matthew Sauer

As Florida slowly begins to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, we are striving to help: moving from the pain of an unprecedented pandemic to the promise of prosperity that is Florida.

We have learned a tremendous amount about ourselves, our communities and the human spirit. We have witnessed, as in any crisis, the best and the worst. We have seen great stories of heroism come to life in our reporting. Frontline nurses and doctors are inspiring us all. Businesses and individuals have come together to take care of those in need. The human spirit is alive and well.

We have heard from business leaders that care deeply about their enterprises, their employees and their customers. Equally, they care about the communities they serve. Everyone is eager to get back to work and realize the economic well-being so important to our sustainability as a community and a society. That is both the fiscal and physical well-being of our communities and state.

“We have learned a tremendous amount about ourselves, our communities and the human spirit. We have witnessed, as in any crisis, the best and the worst. We have seen great stories of heroism come to life in our reporting. Frontline nurses and doctors are inspiring us all. Businesses and individuals have come together to take care of those in need. The human spirit is alive and well.”

We are well armed for this task. The USA Today Network is the umbrella for the 260 local brands that serve local communities in 46 states. Our USA TODAY brand also reaches the entire nation, and collectively, we have seen our readership expand like never before during COVID-19.

Our most recent readership numbers show that we reached an audience of more than 173 million people across the United States on our digital platforms and local websites alone. Plus, we have more than 300,000 campaigns running on behalf of clients across the nation provided by LocalIQ, our marketing solutions organization.

"Local" in that name represents our deep knowledge and the relationship we have with communities and clients. We have served some of these locales for more than 100 years. "IQ" represents our insights, data and leading technology. That all results in a deeper knowledge of the communities we serve and the best practices we deploy to help businesses effectively invest in their growth.

An investment in our solutions generates a two-sided return: Not only do clients see their businesses

thrive, they fund the journalism that creates a healthy economy in which to conduct business — and to live and raise a family.

In Florida, we have 23 newspaper brands across as many markets. That results in us reaching a digital audience of 9 million, nearly 60% of Florida adults each month and more than 2 million readers in print. We are, by far, the most significant media organization collectively in Florida by almost any measure. We believe our investment in the well-being of our communities and the state is unparalleled. We love both. We wake up every day thinking about how we can make our community stronger and help local businesses thrive.

We connect the heart and soul of our communities.

We take this responsibility very seriously and closely collaborate to achieve just that as we think about sustaining and growing our business as well. We know our results will be reflected in the outcome of our work. Those outcomes will determine the level of investment we can make in journalism, a critical component of this democracy.

Therefore, we have brought considerable resources to bear on

helping our communities navigate this pandemic and reopen in a safe and responsible manner as quickly and as is feasible.

As the severity of COVID-19 became clear, we launched Support Local, empowering individuals to support their favorite local restaurants through the purchase of gift certificates. We're continuing to look at how we can expand upon that effort. Currently, we have 912 Florida restaurants represented.

In that spirit — beginning digitally on May 28 and in print on May 31 — we are pulling out the stops to help get our communities activated. We call it Rebuilding America.

We are comprehensively telling the COVID-19 story. Both from a national and local perspective. We targeted 12 important content categories related to the recovery phase of this pandemic. We hope you will enjoy reading what we put together, and you will support and learn from the businesses that have made it possible through their partnership.

We're all in this together and together we will come out stronger than ever. We believe wholeheartedly that our ultimate responsibility is to facilitate community conversation and to provide thought-leadership to ensure that Florida remains the best state to live, work and play anywhere in the world.

We look forward to pulling together to Rebuild Florida and to take it to new heights!

William Barker is the regional president for Florida for LocalIQ and the USA Today Network. Matthew Sauer is the executive editor of the Sarasota Herald-Tribune and Gannett's Florida regional editor.



We're Open
And Dedicated
To Your Safety.

Our number one priority is the safety and well-being of our patients and their families. Because of this, we have implemented additional safety precautions, such as arrival screenings and physical distancing measures in waiting rooms. For parents who wish to make arrangements for their child to see their specialty physician virtually, telehealth options may also be available. For more information on our safety enhancements visit nicklauschildrens.org/covid19safety

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ABOVE: Hospital staff members greet their fans at Delray Medical Center. [THOMAS CORDY/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]

LEFT: Delray Beach Fire Rescue and Palm Beach County Fire Rescue staff organized a show of support for hospital staff in April at Delray Medical Center in Delray Beach. [THOMAS CORDY/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]

Healthcare heroes



ABOVE: The Village of Wellington put on a parade this month through the Wellington Regional Medical Center parking lots. The Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office, Palm Beach County Fire Rescue, Wellington Council members and residents cheered medical workers during a shift change at the hospital. [ALLEN EYESTONE/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]

LEFT: A moment of community at Wellington Regional Medical Center. [ALLEN EYESTONE/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]



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Our emergency departments have stayed open and will continue to. If you have a medical emergency, don't hesitate to call 911 or go to your nearest emergency department.

As we begin welcoming all patients back for regular, routine care, we will continue making your safety a top concern. If your appointment or procedure was delayed, we'll reach out to you to reschedule. You can also visit ClevelandClinicFlorida.org/Access for up-to-date information.

You can also expect some of our locations to look a bit different for a while.

- **We've made adjustments to minimize the number of people in one area and allow for proper social distancing.**
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We will continue encouraging virtual visits, when appropriate, to minimize the need for in-person visits. If you do come to a Cleveland Clinic location in Florida, you should feel confident that you're walking into a safe environment – because you are. When you need care, remember that we're here for every care in the world.

Thank you for your help keeping our facilities and communities safe.



Wael Barsoum, MD
Chief Executive Officer and President
Cleveland Clinic Florida

Palm Beach County masked



ABOVE: Charlie Willis of Palm Beach getting his hair cut at Sunshine.
[DAMON HIGGINS/PALMBEACHDAILYNEWS.COM]

LEFT: Brandon Leon owns and operates Sunshine Barbershop on Palm Beach with his wife Berni. [DAMON HIGGINS/PALMBEACHDAILYNEWS.COM]



Masked shoppers enter the Publix Super Market on Southern Boulevard in West Palm Beach as it opens on April 13. A Palm Beach County emergency order took effect that day advising residents to wear a cloth face cover in public, specifically workers and shoppers who can't always observe social distancing measures. [LANNIS WATERS/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]



County Mayor Dave Kerner [GREG LOVETT/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]



LEFT: Greyhound racing resumed without fans at the Palm Beach Kennel Club. [ALLEN EYESTONE/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]

MIDDLE BOTTOM: Chris Sykes of West Palm Beach, a bartender and server at Drive Shack, hits a few balls while waiting to attend re-opening training. [ALLEN EYESTONE/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]



Alex Ramcharit at PBIA. [GREG LOVETT/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]



Kamal Griess at Abacoa Golf Club in Jupiter. [GREG LOVETT/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]



Debbie Lewis of Palm Beach [DAMON HIGGINS/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]



A resident of MorselLife. [JOSEPH FORZANO/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]

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When the families can hug again

DeSantis hoping to reopen elder-care facilities soon, citing emotional damage from extended lockdown

By John Pacenti
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Gov. Ron DeSantis likes to point out that Florida's elder-care facilities didn't end up like those in other states with an avalanche of coronavirus deaths.

But the fact remains COVID-19 remains embedded in long-term care centers, where a growing percentage of all fatalities in the state have resided.

Still, DeSantis said he wants to open elder-care centers again to visitation, balancing the fact that the isolation may be as debilitating as the risk of contracting the coronavirus for these seniors.

"Having the isolation does come at a psychological and social cost," he said at a May 13 news conference. "We've got to figure out a way to get to yes. We've got to figure out a way to give some folks hope and be able to see their families."

The Florida Department of Health and the elder care community are discussing what allowing visitation again would look like. The governor mentioned the requirements of using personal protective equipment or rapid antibody testing.

"I'm not going to sign off unless I'm convinced it is going to be safe, but I don't think we can just say no. I think we have the responsibility to try," DeSantis said. "These are folks who can really use a psychological boost."

DeSantis closed down visitation officially March 15, sent out strike teams with the Florida National Guard to test seniors and staff, and prohibited hospitals from sending back positive-test residents to facilities.

After saying he would conduct "surveillance testing" at facilities, he is now working with the industry to get all staffers who work in the elder care community tested.

Once that testing is complete, DeSantis may make his move to allow seniors on lockdown at nursing homes and assisted-living facilities to have more freedom.

Veronica Catoe, the CEO of the Florida Assisted Living Association, said just as important to seniors as family visitation is being able to see their doctors in their offices. Seniors at ALFs look forward to the human contact they get with a

Rebuilding America - senior homes

- The governor might considering allowing visitation again to nursing homes once testing is complete.
- Residents and staff would love to see families.
- Elder-care industry wants to discuss testing, PPE.

doctor's visit; contact that is not available through telemedicine.

As for families, Catoe said it goes back to antibody and rapid testing. She said, for instance, if it is known that a resident and a family member both have the antibodies to COVID-19, then it is understood they most likely can't infect each other.

"There are families who want to hug their mom and hug their dad," Catoe said.

Kristin Knapp, spokeswoman for the Florida Health Care Association, which represents 550 nursing homes, said it's not just the residents who want families to return but the staff.

She said caregivers are invested in their residents and being part of their socialization with relatives because "that helps enhance the quality of life."

Residents are still prohibited from communal dining and other group activities. Returning to those activities would also be a step forward, she said.

"For these residents, this is their home. They have friends they want to eat meals with, and they want to get out of their rooms to play their bingo or attend their church services or their synagogue services."

She said the industry wants to bend DeSantis' ear on testing and personal protective equipment that would be required to reopen nursing homes to visitors again.

"We want families to visit," Knapp said. "We are trying to come up with strategies."

Keith Myers, the CEO at MorseLife Health Systems, operates a tiered elder-care community in West Palm Beach.

He shut down family visitation before it was mandated by the state and is apprehensive about opening up the campus again.

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MorseLife employees in West Palm Beach cheer as the special Mother's Day Parade passes by May 9. Residents at MorseLife have been in isolation since the outbreak of the coronavirus. [JOSEPH FORZANO/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]



A resident of MorseLife wave to friends and family as the special Mother's Day Parade procession rolls by at MorseLife in West Palm Beach on May 9. [JOSEPH FORZANO/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]



What do-it-yourself buying tells us

Insiders: Projects heat up industry's mixed outlook

Grace Schneider
Louisville Courier Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Stuck at home in a paralyzing health crisis, people across America finally tackled long-delayed, home-improvement projects that are giving a boost to the do-it-yourself and handyman segments of the U.S. economy.

In Louisville, Kentucky, the COVID-19 crisis has been a completely unexpected boon for Max Daugherty's outdoor living contractor business. New decks, patio upgrades, backyard spruce-ups – the calls are pouring in.

His crew working in Louisville is booked through August, but Daugherty is still wary of what's around the corner for deck rebuilds and other big residential projects in an economy rocked by the pandemic. His guesses about how stay-at-home orders and restricted travel might shrink revenues were so dead wrong starting in March that he's still inclined to play conservative now rather than expand the business.

"I prepared myself for the worst, and it was completely the opposite," said Daugherty, owner of Max Building Designs in Charlestown, Indiana.

He's now delivering 25 quotes a week for prospective jobs, compared with eight to 10 estimates this time last year. But "if we invest in another truck for another crew and things go bad, I've got an investment sitting there that's not returning." And he'd also face laying off workers he'd just hired on.

Such is the dilemma in the red-hot hardware, paint and home services arena around the country, as one of the world's strangest second quarters barrels into its final month.

The pandemic has led many homeowners across the country to pounce on DIY home improvement projects during



Benjamin White, left, and James Emador of Max Building Designs work on building a custom deck for a homeowner in New Albany, Ind. They said they've noticed treated lumber has been scarce. MATT STONE/USA TODAY NETWORK

stay-home orders. And as a result, hardware, home improvement and farm supply stores – which the federal government deemed essential businesses – have seen a massive surge in demand for tools, paint, lawn and garden goods and treated lumber.

Added to that is a higher demand for cleaning supplies, security systems, safety gear, sidewalk chalk and activity kits for youngsters, said Randy Rusk, national spokesman for Do It Best, a co-operative of hardware, lumber, and building materials stores in 50 states and more than 50 countries.

But analysts and marketing experts in the home and hardware industry are cautious. They predict a mixed bag in spending through the end of this year, dragged down by little or no construction in some states and nagging uncertainties surrounding the economic toll from the pandemic.

Smaller, in-home projects have been the bright spot in the sector. During the past two months, as unprecedented restrictions sent workers home and

consigned people to work in bedrooms and at kitchen tables, the home services industry saw consumers flip their attitudes about their surroundings.

At first they were scared. Then, they began looking around their homes and decided they needed to get on projects they'd put off for years, said Larry Janesky, a Connecticut-based contractor with 300 dealers and 700 employees refurbishing attics, basements and roofs across the U.S. Basement waterproofing and refinishing projects took off in the past month or so because people realized they needed to upgrade space for a home office. Roofing also has shot up, Janesky said.

Before the outbreak, spending on home remodeling was expected to post annual growth of 3.9% by the first quarter of 2021. But the latest data rolling together actual and forecasted impacts of the economic shutdown have led to predictions of declines this year, with more of a drop off into 2021, according to Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies.

Where is the home-improvement category headed?

- 1) As Americans stayed at home, the do-it-yourself and home service industries gained momentum from March through early May.
- 2) The immediate forecast remains strong for do-it-yourselfers, especially as we move into spring. The garden segment is exploding at most retailers.
- 3) Will the momentum last through year's end? Analysts offer mixed predictions. The biggest wild card: Will the nation endure a challenging Round 2 of infections as summer slips into fall and winter?

The uncertainty has analysts offering a mixed forecast for what will happen in the category later in the year.

"Whether confidence returns to undertake large projects could be dictated by the depth and duration of the economic and housing market decline," wrote Wedbush analysts led by Seth Basham in a note about Home Depot, MarketWatch reported earlier in May.

Home construction, home sales and the value of existing homes could take a hit, and homeowners' moods could play a big part, said Chris Herbert, managing director of the Harvard-based center.

It predicts more affordable metros in the Midwest and Sunbelt – including Cleveland, Cincinnati, Charlotte, Atlanta, Tampa and Phoenix – to see some gains through the year, of about 2 to 3%.

One big driver to watch is how small businesses rebound in coming months.

"If the government tells entrepreneurs to stay home, you can't open ... we're going to have some real problems," Janesky said. "I'm cautiously optimistic, depending on how long things drag on."



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When schools reopen, how open will they be?

In PBC, space will be handled carefully, and older teachers may insist on staying online

By **Andrew Marra**
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Palm Beach County educators are preparing for a school year like no other: one where classrooms are remade and thousands of students and teachers may refuse to set foot on campus.

With summer approaching and coronavirus still rippling through the region, officials say it's increasingly likely that campuses will not fully reopen when the new academic year starts in August.

To the extent that they do, families should expect them to be very different.

Classes could be smaller, officials say, and hallways emptier. Individual students might go to campus every other day, submit to regular temperature checks and be separated from classmates by extra space or partitions.

"One thing I can tell you is it will definitely look different from when students left March 13," Deputy Schools Superintendent Keith Oswald said. "How we use space in any configuration, from a school bus to a building, is going to be in play."

Superintendent Donald Fennoy has said he doesn't expect online teaching to go away completely in August, and school officials nationwide are considering ways to bring students onto campus in shifts to cut down on crowds.

But local educators say plans for reopening have to account for a less-discussed aspect of the new face of schooling: the unknown number of children and adults who aren't expected to return to campus until health risks recede further.

"There are employees and students who are going to request some special accommodation relative to their health," said Justin Katz, president of the county teachers union. "The district will be hard-pressed to force teachers to school who are in that vulnerable population."

Already, a significant number of teachers in their 60s or who have compromised immune systems have expressed fear about returning to classrooms full of students, Katz said.

It would be wrong to force them to return to campus at considerable personal risk, he said, and early talks with district



Dreyfoos School of the Arts students give each other a hug before boarding school buses March 13, the last day of in-person classes in Palm Beach County. [GREG LOVETT/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]

- Schools are looking to reduce the number of students on campus together
- Many students and teachers may insist on online-only classes
- Classrooms may require costly retrofits

leaders suggest they won't try to.

"We seem to be on a similar page to do whatever needs to be done," Katz said. "Over the summer, we absolutely are going to need to codify what hopefully are our agreements and not just fire people because they are a certain age."

Florida's schools superintendents have asked state education officials to come up with recommendations that local districts can look to as they weigh the best way to reopen.

Among the issues the Florida Association of District School Superintendents want

guidance on: how much space to separate students in the classroom, how many children can ride together on a bus, what protective equipment should campuses make use of and how people should be screened when they arrive.

Reopening during a pandemic is expected to be expensive regardless of the particulars. Already expecting a budget crisis, the district is anticipating big spends on protective gear and materials to retrofit classrooms.

No decisions have been made, but officials speculate that some classes or hallways will need partitions and plexiglass "sneeze guards," along with masks and supplies to test and screen students and employees.

"I suspect we'll be buying a lot of thermometers," said Mike Burke, the school district's chief financial officer.

Hovering over the debates is the broader question of how well students will learn if their time on campus is reduced. Many experts worry that learning has fallen off as students take classes at home on computers.

But officials have an advantage now that they didn't have when virtual learning programs were arranged in March — time.

With two months of trial-and-error and a summer break to plan, educators say they will come up with a workable system that balances safety and learning.

"I think we've learned that everything is possible," Oswald said, "and we'll figure this out, too."

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College life won't look the same this fall

Expected expanded remote learning, repeat testing for coronavirus

By **Ryan McKinnon**
ryan.mckinnon@heraldtribune.com

College students in most Florida universities hoping for a return to normal in the fall will have to wait and see.

The state's 12 public universities recently announced plans to reopen, after being forced to abruptly shut down in March because of COVID-19, and private schools throughout the state are planning their reopening as well, though life on campus may look dramatically different than students are used to.

Remote classes and widespread virus testing will likely become a part of everyday life for many students.

"We are reimagining our spaces, providing cutting-edge care and making testing widely available upon our return to campus," said University of Miami President Julio Frenk. "We just need to coexist with the virus and adapt. At this point, it would take something really very dramatic, which I do not envision, for us not to open in the fall."

But even as school officials make plans to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, questions remain about how feasible social distancing efforts are among students accustomed to sporting events, parties and college life.

State university system Chancellor Marshall Criser was scheduled to present guidelines for reopening campuses in the fall at the university system's Board of Governor's meeting in late May.

The state is allowing each public university to make plans that account for the seriousness of pandemic in their region. Representatives will present their plan to the Board of Governors on June 23.

Keiser University, a private, not-for-profit university serving nearly 20,000 students on 21 Florida campuses, is preparing for students to return to its campuses, including its flagship 100-acre West Palm Beach campus, on Aug.



A student wearing a face mask walks across Museum Road on the University of Florida campus in Gainesville in March. [BRAD MCCLENNY/THE GAINESVILLE SUN]

31.

"We have been working on it for the past seven weeks with a task force on reopening that includes staff, faculty and administration to make sure we have the correct protocols and procedures in place," said Arthur Keiser, chancellor and CEO.

This fall classes are expected to be conducted three ways -- completely on campus, a hybrid of online and on-campus, or fully online classes. For in-person classes, the students will be divided into groups that will attend on alternate days. Classrooms will be set up for social distancing.

The university will incorporate the Centers for Disease Control's COVID-19 guidelines for colleges and universities issued May 20.

Students will spend the first week in orientation to prepare them for the new

requirements, then start classes after Labor Day, Keiser said. Students, staff and faculty will be required to wear masks.

A new four-story multimillion-dollar residence hall is scheduled to open for the fall semester at the West Palm Beach campus, its only U.S. campus with dorms. It was designed to increase dorm capacity to 220 beds. However, as the CDC guidelines call for one student per dorm room, the university will add only 160 beds, for a total of 600. A living area in each two-bedroom suite will be used to house one student.

Palm Beach Atlantic University intends to welcome students to the campus this fall with such innovations as a separate dorm on campus for isolation should a student become sick.

Lynn University leaders say they are optimistic that students will return to

What to expect as colleges and universities reopen

Details remain in the works for how colleges and universities will adapt to COVID-19 in the fall, but a few major themes have emerged, as students and families make their plans for the 2020-21 academic year.

The state's 12 public universities will be unveiling plans for reopening at the university system's Board of Governors meeting on June 23. Each school's plans will vary, based on their region, student body and campus layout.

Students at both public and private colleges should expect social-distancing guidelines.

Schools are preparing for expanded online offerings. In some cases, this will include courses that are typically hands-on.

campus for the fall semester.

Remote Learning

As campuses emptied in March, professors transitioned their classes online for the remainder of the semester. University leaders are preparing for the possibility that remote learning will continue into the fall.

Florida State University Provost Sally E. McRorie told faculty members in an email May 4 that the majority of courses would continue to be taught remotely in the fall.

"We plan to offer only face-to-face courses that cannot be done through other pedagogies," McRorie said in an email obtained by the News Service of Florida.

For some coursework, the shift to remote learning is relatively seamless, but classes dependent on hands-on work and group discussion are difficult to replicate in an online format.

Gannett reporters Emily Bloch, Pam McCabe, Thomas D'Angelo and Susan Salisbury contributed to this report.



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What to expect when schools reopen

Scenarios predict hybrid of in-person and at-home

Erin Richards
USA TODAY

Imagine, for a moment, American children returning to school this fall. The school week looks vastly different, with most students attending school two or three days a week and doing the rest of their learning at home. At school, desks are spaced apart to discourage touching. Some classrooms extend into unused gymnasiums, libraries or art rooms – left vacant while schools put on hold activities that cram lots of children together.

Arrival, dismissal and recess happen on staggered schedules and through specific doors to promote physical distancing. Students eat lunch at their desks. Children learn with the same peers every day – or teachers move around while students stay put – to discourage mingling with new groups.

Teachers and other education staff at higher risk of contracting the virus continue to teach from home, while younger or healthier educators teach in-person. Everyone washes their hands. A lot. Frequently touched school surfaces get wiped down. A lot.

That outline of a potential school day was drawn from interviews with more than 20 education leaders determining what reopened schools might look like come fall. New guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention supports those plans and more: Teachers and older students should wear masks, especially when they have to interact in close quarters.

In the absence of a vaccine for COVID-19, social distancing and hygiene will be important to limit spreading the virus. The question is how to successfully implement those measures in schools usually filled with crowded hallways, class sizes of more than 30 people



Staffers install a plastic glass pane on a teacher's table. ALEX GRIMM/GETTY IMAGES

and lunchrooms of hundreds.

“The whole thing is overwhelming,” said Dan Weisberg, a former district official and the head of TNT, a nonprofit formerly known as The New Teacher Project.

“This is where federal dollars could help,” Weisberg said. “This is where state guidance could help. This is where galvanizing people behind the idea on how to plan for next year could help.”

The new CDC guidance on reopening the economy, a 60-page document released in the third week of May, recommends that schools place desks six feet apart, serve lunch in classrooms, close playgrounds, keep children in the same groups every day and cancel field trips and extracurricular activities. It also recommends daily health checks and temperature screenings of staff and students daily, if feasible.

Baby steps toward reopening

A few U.S. schools have cautiously

returned to in-person instruction.

In California’s Marin County, three school buildings opened May 18 to serve the most needy students: those with disabilities, and those who had fallen off track in high school and were not participating remotely.

Teachers wearing masks worked with eight cohorts of 12 students across the three schools, officials said. Students washed their hands on arrival, and tape marks in classrooms reminded some to keep their distance. New cell-phone sign-in systems track who comes in and out.

In Montana, 11 schools reopened after Gov. Steve Bullock turned such decisions over to districts this month.

Willow Creek School, located 40 miles west of Bozeman, reopened on May 7. The tiny K-12 school enrolls 56 students; only 37 returned for in-person instruction.

On a recent afternoon, teachers supervised recess while wearing cloth face masks and holding 6-foot pool noodles.

When recess ended, students lined up on orange circles spray-painted on the sidewalk at evenly marked intervals. As the line moved inside, each student was met at the door with a squirt of hand sanitizer.

The school has implemented staggered schedules and separated desks. Younger students walk through hallways holding hula-hoops to prevent them from touching things.

‘Economics will drive choices’

Reopening schools is critical to fully bring back the economy. More parents can work when their children are in school. Just as important: Many kids aren’t learning much at home. Those learning the least are students who lack devices and internet access.

Bringing kids back to school presents major worries about health.

Many school buildings lack the space to keep children a recommended six feet apart. That’s why education leaders foresee a need to continue virtual learning, with kids attending school in person on alternating days or weeks.

And that’s only the start. Districts also must figure out food service, especially for the 52% of students who qualify for free- or reduced-price lunches and depend on those meals. Schools must provide enough qualified staff to teach students in smaller groups. They must provide emotional support to staff and students. And they need to develop measures to help catch up children who have fallen the farthest behind.

Then schools have to figure out how to pay for it all.

“Economics will drive the choices districts make,” said Marguerite Roza, a professor and director of the Edumetrics Lab at Georgetown University.

Superintendents from 62 of the country’s largest school districts have called on Congress to provide about \$200 billion more in educational stabilization funds.

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Klementia Bujaj	Skylar Hines	Taina Romeus
Mara Camacho	Daniel Holmes	Michael Sabatello
James Cameron	Jennifer Jacobs	Ana Maria Salazar
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John Cantando	Fadley Jean Simon	Giancarlo Schiappa
Jedidiah Castricone	Rick-Paul Jean Simon	Samire Senatus
Ximena Cherres	Christopher Kaczwaro	Daniel Sledge
Luca Ciminella	Milo Keogh	Riley Sousa
Olivia Colangelo	Joseph Kleisley	Matthew Suto
Chloe Colbert	Christopher LaCour	Emma Timms
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Lugene Derilus	Samari Martinez	Madeline Viton
Nicholas Diedrich	Eleanor Mayes	Austin Wallace
Jhiscar D'or	Micah McKinney	Jasper Walsh
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Nicholas Falcone	Nicholas Mee	Charles Wilkinson, III
Clare Farley	Padraig Mee	Jake Wise
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Masks, distancing await students

School leaders working on new guidelines

Sommer Brugal
Treasure Coast Newspapers
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

How will schools look when they re-open after this pandemic? Even the people directing the sweeping changes aren't sure.

Virtual learning may still be in place; schools could implement staggered class schedules; desks may be situated 6 feet apart; students could be required to wear masks.

"These are plans and options we may utilize, but there are still unknowns," explained St. Lucie County School District Superintendent E. Wayne Gent. "What's important is that it'll look different."

As this school year comes to a close — and uncertainty surrounding the novel coronavirus endures — Treasure Coast school districts are grappling with how to adequately prepare to possibly re-open come fall.

Students and teachers since March have been learning and teaching virtually because of the pandemic. Annual end-of-year events were either held virtually or postponed.

The Florida Association of District Superintendents has recommended a series of steps to prepare for the 2020-21 school year and then to open the doors for the fall semester.

Many of those recommendations — adjusting class sizes; reducing the number of students riding on the bus; screening students, families and staff daily for symptoms; and limiting on-campus visitors — mirror what officials in Indian River, Martin and St. Lucie counties are considering.

'Initial challenges'

Indian River County schools are preparing "multiple paths" to reopen



Luz Morales, a paraprofessional at Port Salerno Elementary School, chats with third grade student Darlen Cifuentes Lopez, 8, of Stuart. LEAH VOSS/TCPALM

schools, Superintendent David Moore said: a virtual reality, a blended reality and a push-back model.

The blended model could include staggered lunch times — or eating lunch in classrooms instead of in a cafeteria — and having "A and B days," where groups of students alternate being in school and attending class virtually, he said.

But all options present "initial challenges," according to Moore. Attending school every-other day, for example, could be problematic for some parents.

"If we solve our problem, are we creating additional problems" for our families, Moore said.

Transportation could also present an issue.

Buses typically hold 45-60 students, Moore said. If new mandates require students sit 6 feet apart, the district may need to hire additional drivers.

In St. Lucie County, challenges include understanding how schools can safely provide breakfast and lunch to students, figuring out how to stagger

morning drop-off and afternoon pickup and requiring students and staff to wear masks, Gent said.

Gathering around lockers and outside classrooms also may be prohibited, he said.

In Martin County, officials are planning for students to return to their schools in August, spokeswoman Jennifer DeShazo said in a statement. How schools will operate and look, however, is "dependent on CDC guidelines and best practices that are in place at the time," Chief Academic Officer Tracey Miller said in a statement.

Consideration of reopening options will continue throughout the summer, Miller said.

More services, additional concerns

Equity issues and other lasting impacts virtual instruction may have on students — academically and emotionally — are top concern for all Indian River district officials, according to the su-

Tips for parents

Going back to school in the fall will be a different experience, whether it's in physical classrooms, virtually or a mixed approach. Here are basics parents should share with their children:

■ Participate in group activities, but be smart about it. Avoid close contact with others and observe social-distancing recommendations.

■ Carry your own personal hand sanitizer. Use it often and use it liberally.

■ Wear a mask, whether it's required or not. And encourage your friends to do the same. You're helping them stay safe and healthy, and they're doing the same for you.

perintendent.

"We know that there will be some social-emotional focus that we'll need to have in place" when students return in the fall, Moore said. "We know our kids are coming in (next school year) not as prepared."

Officials would be naive to dismiss any impact these months of virtual learning have had on students, Moore said.

Indian River already is conducting iReady reading and math assessments to understand the effects of virtual learning, Moore said, and to "take a temperature gauge to know where we really are."

Students in Martin County also will be assessed at the start of the new school year, but exactly how that will happen is yet to be determined, DeShazo said.

Sommer Brugal is TCPalm's education reporter for Indian River, St. Lucie and Martin counties. You can keep up with Sommer on Twitter @smbrugal and give her a call at 772-221-4231.

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Touchless options the new norm in grocery industry

By Kevin Bouffard
The Ledger

LAKELAND — The COVID-19 pandemic didn't so much alter the future of the supermarket industry as much as hasten it.

Trends that had already begun — including online shopping, drive-by pickup, robotics and artificial intelligence — got a boost during the COVID-19 economic shutdown because they offered alternatives to shoppers wary of crowded supermarkets, increasing the threat of coronavirus infection, two industry analysts said.

“Online sales have gone up exponentially,” said Brian Choi, the chief executive officer at the Food Institute, an industry research organization. “We’ve seen sales up 100% and 200% in some cases.”

David Livingston, an analyst with his own firm, DJL Research in Hawaii, agreed he’s seen that trend nationwide in industry reports and in his own experience.

“A lot of people where I live are opting into home delivery and online shopping,” Livingston said.

Online sales soared during April at Sprouts Farmers Market, said Kalia Pang, a spokeswoman for the Phoenix-based natural foods supermarket chain with 23 stores in Florida.

“For April, Sprouts’ ecommerce sales increased over 950% from last year, representing 13% of sales,” Pang said in an email to the USA TODAY Network-Florida. “Pickup service allows customers to plan grocery pick up for the same day or to schedule several days in advance, subject to availability.”

Even before COVID-19, grocery industry analysts saw online shopping as a future trend. That became clear in 2017, when online retail behemoth Amazon purchased the Whole Foods supermarket chain for \$13.7 billion.

But traditional shoppers, particularly older ones, were slow to embrace purchasing groceries online, Choi and Livingston agreed. It took COVID-19 to break that logjam.

“It has helped people take that first step,” Livingston said. “Because they’re home, it’s easier to have it delivered anyway.”

Instacart, one of the largest third-party grocery delivery services, has also seen a surge in demand, according to an April 10 statement on its website.

“Over the course of the last few weeks, the customer demand for our service and the sheer number of shoppers on our platform has surged in the wake of COVID-19,” the statement said. “Our order volume was up more than 300% year-over-year last



Curbside pickup, online shopping, robotics and artificial intelligence are trends in the grocery industry that received a major boost during the COVID-19 economic shutdown because they offered alternatives to shoppers wary of crowded supermarkets. [IAN YOUNG ILLUSTRATION/USA TODAY NETWORK]



Pictured is the Sprouts Farmers Market in Wellington in March 2019. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Sprouts’ ecommerce sales increased over 950% from last year, according to a company spokeswoman. [ALLEN EYESTONE/PALM BEACH POST]

week, and our shopper community has grown to more than 350,000 active shoppers, up from 200,000 just two weeks ago.”

The grocery industry benefited from the closure of restaurants in many states during

the past two months, Choi and Livingston said.

Although restaurants have begun to reopen, the industry will continue to benefit as people remain reluctant to expose themselves to crowds, they agreed.

“The psyche of the American public has shifted,” Choi said. “They are much more wary of going to public places and exposing themselves to catching the coronavirus. More people will likely stay away from sit-down restaurants from fine dining to casual.”

“People are rediscovering their supermarkets,” Livingston said. “People are going to start appreciating what’s in their supermarkets more, discovering more.”

Additional sanitation measures, faster restocking and other pandemic-related measures forced grocery companies to hire more people, Livingston and Choi said.

Overall grocery companies have seen profit margins shaved by 1% to 2% because of the costs of COVID-19 measures, Choi said. That’s a significant share of the

Consumer tips

- Five things to expect at your favorite supermarket 10 years from now:
- More traffic at drive-by pickup areas as consumers increasingly shop online.
 - Robots roaming the aisles cleaning floors and scanning shelves for stocking.
 - Fewer or even no cashiers as check out is handled by smart devices through artificial intelligence technology.
 - Clear plastic screens at deli and bakery counters and other work stations to prevent disease transmission.
 - Continued emphasis on enhanced cleaning and sanitation of shelves, counters and other frequently touched surfaces.

industry’s typical profit margins, which range from 2% to 5%.

That’s increased interest in replacing workers, such as cleaning staff and cashiers, with robots and other automated systems, the analysts agreed. That trend also was well underway before COVID-19, Livingston said.

“The advantage, from a management standpoint, when using robots is they don’t get sick and you don’t have to pay health benefits,” Choi said.

Amazon has pioneered replacing cashiers in its Amazon Go convenience stores with an artificial intelligence system that operates through a smartphone. The system detects when a shopper takes an item off the shelf, adds it to the shopping cart and removes it if the shopper returns it to the shelf.

Payment is made automatically when the shopper leaves the store.

The technology will likely be adopted more widely among supermarket chains because Amazon is already licensing the system to supermarket chains, Choi said.

“Eventually it will cost less than to have physical cashiers,” he said.

One change brought by COVID-19 — the increased sanitary measures, social distancing and mandatory masks for employees — will likely continue because customers expect it, Choi and Livingston said. Companies have adopted many of those changes as part of their risk management strategies.

“That’s going to continue because shoppers are going to feel safer,” Livingston said. “Managers will want to keep it that way.”

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Grocery shopping may be forever altered

E-commerce surges while in-store protocols evolve

Alexander Coolidge
Cincinnati Enquirer
USA TODAY NETWORK

If you’re suffering from new coronavirus fatigue and craving normalcy, don’t go shopping for relief at your supermarket anytime soon.

The grocery industry isn’t talking about normal for the rest of 2020. It’s talking about the “new normal” and what lies beyond.

Chances are shoppers can expect months more of seeing store employees wearing masks and gloves — and store signs urging shoppers to follow suit.

But industry officials believe the pandemic crisis and shopping frenzy are beginning to settle into a busy new grind as America tries to reopen the economy.

The “new normal” that’s unfolding includes:

- A big shift to e-commerce.
- Continued occasional shortages for meat and produce items (though toilet paper is predicted to become reliably restocked on shelves by the end of summer).
- Higher prices as supermarkets continue to pick up the slack of feeding Americans amid wide restaurant shutdowns.

What lies beyond depends on whether consumers or their finances ultimately change during the pandemic and once it ends. Industry officials wonder if Americans might keep cooking more at home. They also don’t know how much a worsening economy will change consumer needs.

“There is much we still do not know. How long will it last? How many lives will be lost or irreversibly changed? What will be the economic impact?” confided Kroger CEO Rodney McMullen to shareholders of the nation’s largest supermarket chain in a May 12 letter.

Digital groceries explode with pandemic

Fear of exposure to the virus has driven legions of customers online in a bid to avoid crowds and cut their potential risk.

In just a few weeks, the pandemic crisis has advanced the digital sale of groceries by years, food industry officials say.

Before the coronavirus, about 3% of U.S. grocery sales were ordered for curbside pickup or at-home delivery, industry officials said. In recent weeks, 20-25% of groceries sold began with a click on a mobile phone or computer.

“The pandemic has done in the last five, six weeks for e-commerce what we didn’t expect to happen for five years,” said Doug Baker, vice president of industry relations for FMI, an Arlington, Virginia-based trade group.

With so many customers feeling compelled to try buying their groceries online, industry officials believe many will grow comfortable with the service.

With the online surge, shoppers are beginning to notice more parking spaces at Walmart, Kroger and other retailers dedicated to serving customers for pickup services. Walmart is also pushing its delivery business, expanding an express two-hour service to more than 1,000 stores in May. Also, Kroger and Amazon’s Whole Foods are beginning to convert a handful of locations into “dark stores” that don’t admit customers but focus entirely on pickup-only service.

Shortages ahead for meat, not toilet paper

First, there was panic. Then there was panic-buying and hoarding. And now, there are disruptions too.

What’s so darned difficult about keeping enough toilet paper stocked so there are no shortages at stores?

The short answer is two-fold.



Masked shoppers are likely to be part of the new normal in grocery stores. ALBERT CESARE/USA TODAY NETWORK

First, after many companies encouraged employees to work from home, a lot more demand was heaped onto supermarkets and other retailers. But second, an unprecedented wave of stockpiling overwhelmed the readily replenished shelves at stores.

Kroger CEO McMullen told investors in April toilet paper was selling out of stores every day by noon or even 10 a.m. He added it was a shock for the supply chain to try to serve a customer who had quickly decided to quadruple the home supply. He alluded to a comic strip that depicted a grandparent decades from now finally reporting their stockpile was used up.

“I have no idea how much toilet paper people have in their houses,” McMullen marveled. “We don’t know what the demand really is ... we’re ordering twice what we used to — and we’re selling twice what we used to.”

Still, some industry analysts believe the hoarding will come to an end after

consumers realize they have more than enough on hand — and storing it all begins to crowd their homes.

Experts say meat and produce items will continue to see interruptions based on health concerns at American processing plants.

Price hikes, sour economy weigh on shoppers

A tidal wave of customers sweeping into stores with a limited number of products to sell, prompting shortages of key items could also lead to rising food prices. Experts say it’s a classic case of rebalancing of supply and demand.

Earlier this month federal officials reported the Consumer Price Index in April notched its largest one-month price increase for groceries in nearly 50 years. Overall grocery prices jumped 2.6% in just 30 days, more than five times the 0.5% inflation rate recorded in February and March.

Going forward, grocery prices will be caught in a tug of war between high demand and shortages pushing prices up and consumer jitters over a deteriorating economy and soaring job losses that will drag prices downward.

Future fallout in flux

Industry officials aren’t sure how broader uncertainty over the economy and efforts to “reopen” the rest of the economy will affect consumers and how they shop.

There is concern that if the economy turns sour, shoppers will cut back. Part of such a shift would include consumers continuing to cook more meals at home to save money.

“People might have become more comfortable cooking at home,” said Simon Gunzburg, a research analyst at Euromonitor International (and Hoyle’s colleague) in Chicago. “Whether they actually like it remains to be seen. That could have a lasting impact.”



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Drive-thru farmers markets flourish

Adaptation may stick around after pandemic

Lindsey Leake
Treasure Coast Newspapers
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

More than two decades ago, Fort Pierce dentist Gina Dean whipped up a batch of sweets for her daughter’s school fundraiser. She hasn’t stopped baking since.

Dean launched Gina’s Bake Shop, which in 1997 became an inaugural vendor of the Downtown Fort Pierce Farmers’ Market. She can count on one hand the number of Saturdays she hasn’t sold her cookies, cakes and confectionery to sweet-tooths.

“This is a reduced menu,” Dean said, waving her gloved hands over plastic bins full of “cinni-stix,” apricot scones and triple-chocolate cookies. “I usually have much more than this.”

On May 9, Dean and other vendors trumpeted deals behind cloth masks, shoppers never left their cars, tents stood 20 feet apart, and no music sounded. It was the fourth consecutive Saturday the Fort Pierce market was held in a Lawnwood Stadium parking lot of Virginia Avenue, instead of its famed waterfront home on Melody Lane.

One of the market’s points of pride is it occurs rain or shine — or pandemic. The lingering coronavirus prompted not only a change in the market’s location but also its format. The weekly affair first transitioned to a drive-thru market April 18.

Other local bazaars, including the Stuart Green Market and Farmers Market Oceanside Vero Beach, have also veered from their weekend rituals to keep business afloat. Agricultural and public health experts are wary of markets returning to normal anytime soon.

“Down at the waterfront, it’s always packed during the season, so it’s hard to social distance,” Dean said. “This makes



Hundreds of patrons drive to the Downtown Fort Pierce Farmers’ Market on April 18 in Fort Pierce. CRYSTAL VANDER WEIT/SPECIAL TO TCPALM

it a little easier ... people have adapted.”

Mother of invention

Ed Lounds, of Broken Plow Farms in Fort Pierce, hoisted a plastic grocery bag into a customer’s four-door pickup truck. Behind him, displayed atop billowing checkered tablecloths, were jars of guava jelly, loaves of bacon bread and pyramids of tomatoes.

“This has been good and different,” Lounds said of the drive-thru format at the John B. Park Sports Complex. “People are glad to be out.”

Skvarch, who specializes in commercial horticulture, is part of the reason the Fort Pierce tradition has thrived in spite of the pandemic. He worked with market leadership and the St. Lucie County Parks and Recreation Department to devise a plan to keep local growers and consumers connected.

“Innovation is one of the things that are gonna come out of all of this,”

Skvarch said.

The new venue is ideally suited to drive-thru shopping, Skvarch said, boasting shaded areas for vendors and wide driveways for patrons.

There were hiccups to overcome — some cars initially had to wait an hour in line — but Skvarch estimated over 2,000 vehicles came through each of the first two weeks. The traffic flow is such that shoppers cruise past every booth, and Skvarch said some vendors reported record sales.

“They [shoppers] don’t have to find a parking place, which you can’t do in [downtown] Fort Pierce,” Lounds said. “And if you find one, you gotta walk a long way.”

Late spring is already a tough time for vendors, Skvarch noted; snowbirds flock north and sales drop. About the time Gov. Ron DeSantis’ safer-at-home order took effect in April, some state and local growers were at the height of their harvests, Skvarch said.

“Being able to provide this market for them, I thought, was crucial for them to maintain their existence,” Skvarch said. “I think it meant a lot to the vendors.”

Inventiveness has served other Treasure Coast markets well. The Stuart Green Market, normally held downtown, initiated a drive-thru marketplace at the Martin County Fairgrounds in March. Farmers Market Oceanside Vero Beach forged Farmers Market Drop Off, an online shop where residents of Vero Beach and Fort Pierce can arrange no-contact deliveries.

While some vendors took advanced orders before COVID-19 hit, Skvarch thinks digital sales is something all proprietors who offer their goods at local markets should consider.

Second wave

Brenda Gibbons has mastered the melding of centuries-old farmers market traditions and 21st-century vending. The retired nurse, who runs Gibbons Farms Organics in Fort Pierce with her husband and sister, said customers often order produce online and pick it up at the Downtown Fort Pierce Farmers’ Market.

“We do a huge pre-order business,” Gibbons said. “It just about wipes us out for market because I’ve got so much going out early.”

Gibbons has no doubt the market will return to its original format and venue. That’s not all she’s sure of.

“I know for a fact that we’re gonna have more of this virus,” Gibbons said. “I’m afraid we’re gonna have a second wave.”

Lindsey Leake, TCPalm’s explanatory reporter, holds an M.A. from American University and B.A. from Princeton. Follow her on Twitter (@NewsyLindsey), Facebook (@LindseyMLEake) and Instagram (@newsylindsey), call her at 772-529-5378, and send news tips to lindsey.leake@tcpalm.com.



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Drink Responsibly!

REBUILDING

From Page A1

Travel, tourism, food and dining, real estate, healthcare, education, arts and entertainment, retail shopping, and sports will all adapt in fits and starts to this new COVID-19 world.

We're just beginning to stumble our way through this uncharted reverse-Humpty Dumpty period. Remember, the putting back together will take a lot longer than the falling off the wall.

My gym opened recently. So did my barber shop.

I'm not ready to return to either place yet. But eventually ... eventually. Right? There will be a time and a schedule for each of us.

As you will see from the stories in this Rebuilding America project, a lot of people have been thinking about this reconstructed future, looking at the pieces, and trying to figure out how this new normal might function again.

I guess you can say that "all the king's horses and all the king's men" are on the job.

Meanwhile, all those basic social conventions, those unwritten contracts we all have with each other when we share the public space, will be renegotiated.

As I write this, I'm sitting in a local car dealership, waiting for my vehicle to be serviced. Everybody's wearing a mask because there are signs everywhere with a gentle reminder to do so.

"We can provide a new mask for you if you don't have one," the signs say.

"We have outside seating available for those who will not wear one."

One day, masks won't be mandatory, and what we've come to know as "social distancing" will be relaxed.



It's all in at the new pickleball courts in Boca Raton as Don Karel (left) watches Faith Hough return a shot to their doubles opponents Lisa Grant and Marvin Dinnerstein at Hillsboro El Rio Park North earlier this month. [LANNIS WATERS/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]

And then we'll be able to experience our vulnerable loved ones again, not only through glass or on a computer screen, but by touch.

That's something that won't ever be taken for granted again, and it will be months, maybe years away from happening.

And what about everybody else? Not our loved ones, but the scores of people we cross paths with every day on the street, in the supermarket, or at the next restaurant table.

Will we ever shake a stranger's hand again? Will we ever stop buying hand sanitizer? Will we ever step in a crowded elevator?

And maybe, those masks will linger. Especially now that they're becoming fashion accessories from brand names such as Louis Vuitton, Tommy Hilfiger and Johnny Was.

But maybe this is focusing on the surface things, the things that don't matter. And that Instead of worrying about the superficial tears in the social fabric, we should be looking for the new bridges being built.

Like my wife's 86-year-old mother learning how

to Zoom. Or the weekly chats I now have with all of my siblings and their children. Or for the simple pleasure of a long walk.

If you're fortunate enough to be spared the medical and economic trauma caused by the COVID-19 outbreak, it's not the end of the world — it's just the end of the world as we knew it, and a chance to live in a new world and grow from that experience.

Take for example, the students at Florida Atlantic University, who like millions of other college students, were evacuated from their dorms and sent home, left to finish their spring semester online.

For the FAU students in my feature writing class, that meant turning their gaze inward, and writing about what it was like returning for an extended time to their childhood homes, the one they thought they had left.

"It hasn't been all bad," one student wrote. "I've learned I love to cook (authentic ramen noodles is on the list this week), and my writing has hit an uptick in quality."

"However, I think the biggest thing that I've

learned from my quarantine with my family is to have the ability to work amid chaos," he continued. "Being in a family of seven, something is always happening. A jump rope competition, movie night, Bible study — all could happen in one day."

"I've learned how to find time for myself and get stuff done while being in a quarantined madhouse."

Or consider what's happening to pickleball.

Pickleball, a downsized version of tennis, is geared for older people who don't have the knees or the enthusiasm to run after lively tennis balls.

With a smaller court, plastic balls, and paddles that look like oversized ping-pong ones, Pickleball has become a popular game for retirees.

Close to where I live in Boca Raton, the city just created four pickleball courts in a public park. I decided to try them for the first time a couple of weeks ago, after the parks reopened.

But it can be difficult to get on the courts now. The reason: Young people are jamming the courts, playing with the new pickleball

paddles they ordered from Amazon.

COVID-19 has turned younger people on to pickleball. Will it stick? Who knows?

"It's always wise to look ahead, but difficult to look further than you can see," Winston Churchill once warned.

But it's a good bet that there will be a day when we finally put this behind us.

And that will be a relief, and for some — the lucky ones — nothing more than a wistful memory.

For while we're here, this temporary state ought to be observed, not only in its hardships, but in its opportunity to experience things in a new way.

Tomas Roberts, a 26-year-old poet and filmmaker from London, gave it a name. He called it "The Great Realisation."

He explained it in a 4-minute YouTube video posted at the end of April. The video has gotten tens of millions of views, and has been translated into

Spanish, French, German, Italian, Hebrew, Arabic and Russian.

It's in the form of a bedtime story read by a father to his young son. The story, told in rhyme, is about a distant time — the time we are living in now.

"It was a world of waste and wonder. Of poverty and plenty. Back before we understood why hindsight's 2020," it begins.

The poem goes on to say that the virus of 2020 caused people to enjoy the simple pleasures more, and to reconnect in a deeper way to the people around them.

"Some people started dancing, some were singing, some were baking," it said. "We've grown so used to bad news but some good news was in the making."

"And so when we found the cure, and were allowed to go outside, we all preferred the world we found, to the one we'd left behind."

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Nick Moschella

Post, Daily News will tell the stories of recovery, just as we did the heartbreaks of crisis

Mother Nature blesses our little slice of paradise with a spectacular opening act every morning — sunrise over Palm Beach County.

Slow, soothing, with streaks of heavenly light and distinct colors you won’t find in a box of Crayolas. It’s bursting with hope, a promise that difficult times are another day behind.

How fitting a symbol for what we’re now facing together as a community: Our reopening act.

However long it takes to return to days of postcard-perfect leisure and diesel-powered prosperity, The Palm Beach Post and Palm Beach Daily News are here to tell our stories of recovery and help boost our local businesses.

We’ve been with you from the start of the COVID-19 crisis with a team of journalists dedicated to providing essential information and in-depth coverage. We’ve analyzed data to track this unprecedented pandemic, detailed the brave efforts of our health-care specialists, examined a workforce and business community brought to their knees and chronicled the lives of neighbors we’ve lost.

Along the way, there has been no shortage of inspiring stories as businesses and residents united and improvised to develop ways to support the thousands who’ve lost their jobs and to salute our front-line workers.

Now, increasingly encouraged by familiar sights and sounds — breezy days at the beach, the whisks of golf swings, store signs flickering to life in malls and entertainment destinations from Harbourside to Downtown Palm Beach Gardens to Clematis Street, Atlantic Avenue and Mizner Park — we’re ready to reignite our economy.

As part of the Gannett-wide Rebuilding America initiative, The Post and Daily News are focusing on key categories — from health care to tourism and transportation to real estate, retail shopping, dining and more — to help navigate the new ways of this upside-down world during the pandemic recovery in Palm Beach County.

Our newsrooms will continue to report about what temporary and permanent changes to expect as we inch toward whatever definition of normalcy frames our future. How long will we be masked consumers? What measures will be in place to ensure healthy conditions? How soon before our economy is booming again?



Christina Caldovino and her sons Robbie, 10, and Nickie, 8, watch sunrise at the Juno Beach Pier on May 18, the first day the pier and Palm Beach County beaches were open again. “We were really looking forward to being back on the first day to see the sunrise,” said Caldovino, of Royal Palm Beach. [LANNIS WATERS/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]

As Peter Ricci, the director of Florida Atlantic University’s Hospitality and Tourism Management program, told Post reporter Alexandra Clough for her piece about the future of Sunshine State tourism, “We will re-emerge as a completely different industry than we were.”

The Post and Daily News stand in a supreme position to help businesses reopen with smart, creative, data-driven strategies. In the past year, we have connected with more than 2,000 local businesses, offering an array of promotional options on our digital platforms and in our print publications.

Our audience continues to grow with more than 500,000 digital and print readers each week. In our core market for content delivery, The Post and Daily News reach nearly 42 percent of adult households.

And now there’s additional firepower — we’re part of Gannett’s marketing agency, LocalIQ, which gives our advertising team access to information that helps drive more than 300,000 clients in more than 260 communities across the U.S. What’s working best to engage with consumers on websites or in advertising campaigns?

“Our goal is to help every business tell their story better than they’ve ever told it before,” Post and Daily News Advertising Leader Chadi Irani said.

What’s most important is our connection to the community — relationships are what really matters.

Judy Green has been an advertising specialist for more than 15 years at The Post. She can practically recite the family trees of some of her closest clients and is in tune to their musical tastes and favorite recreational activities.

Now she’s focusing on how to help them deliver a message to consumers who are cautiously returning to the retail space.

“Anthony’s closed for the first time ever,” Judy said of the 125-year-old, West Palm Beach-based women’s apparel store. “They want people to come back to their stores, but they want them to know it’s a safe environment, that they’re taking all the right precautions.

“They’re taking this very seriously.”

More than ever, Judy said, her job goes beyond a business transaction.

“We’re here to help people,” she said.

To that end, advertising specialist Jeanine McMahon is reaching out to clients “in whatever ways they’re comfortable.”

She’s done Zoom meetings, but jokes that some clients “are more afraid of technology than the virus.” So she masks up for in-person discussions, as well.

No matter the engagement, the goal is to help brainstorm the best ways to reinvent and reconnect.

Be it present or prospective

advertisers, there’s the additional bonus of helping to support local journalism.

“People who were questioning the value of the newspaper, who were letting Facebook or free publications become their mainstream news, are now cognizant of the value of local news and the risk of not supporting it,” Jeanine said. “We have so much to talk about with our content. So much to be proud of.”

Judy recalls another difficult time in Palm Beach County when journalism related to her efforts to land advertisers “went beyond the sale.”

She took “a personal interest” in The Post’s award-winning coverage of the opioid epidemic, including the “Heroin: Killer of a Generation” project that told the stories of all 216 heroin-related overdose victims in 2015.

“We put faces on all of those opioid overdoses,” she said. “You realized, ‘This could be anybody.’ It’s the same with this virus — it can be anybody.”

Essential journalism. Effective business partnerships.

Check out that sunrise. We’re ready for a bright, new day.

Nick Moschella is executive editor of The Palm Beach Post and market leader for The Post and Palm Beach Daily News.

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To rebuild, we need all hands on deck

Divisiveness has crept into our handling of the virus, at just the wrong time

By the Editorial Boards
USA Today Florida Network

This is the hard part. It shouldn’t be so, but it is.

Few would have thought, as Florida pushes ahead with reopening, and eventually rebuilding our coronavirus-ravaged economy, that one of the biggest impediments would be ourselves.

Because this is the point, after three months of daily sacrifice, where we should all be buying into the now all-too-familiar mantra: We are all in this together.

Instead, that motto is being met with the cynical question: Are we really?

The answer is a simple, yes. And we need to act like it.

Through self-imposed and government-ordered quarantines, we’ve already suffered much together. Shutting our businesses. Emptying our school and college campuses. And mourning nearly 2,500 of our family and friends dead from COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus.

With enviable drive and resilience, Floridians from Pensacola to Palm Beach weathered it all. Largely because we all believed that we were in this together. That, no matter who we were, or where or how we lived, we were all at some degree of risk. And we were all willing to upend our lives to beat back the coronavirus.

Yes, South Florida — Palm Beach,



Signs for social distancing were prevalent as Lake Worth Beach reopened May 18. [GREG LOVETT/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]

Broward and Miami-Dade counties — has suffered the brunt of the virus damage. Yes, our nursing homes and assisted-living facilities offered up a plethora of petri dishes for virus spread. Yes, our tourism-dependent economy made our jobs particularly vulnerable.

Still, we somehow managed to lean on one another because we believed that we were all suffering the same fate. That is, until we didn’t.

On the way to reopening our state and returning to some semblance of normalcy we somehow lost that unity.

As we looked to reopen, we allowed a different message to come between us.

The unity built around “staying safe” became fractured as fear of lost jobs and golf rounds replaced fear of spreading a killer virus to our neighbors. Worse, we stopped talking and started shouting, making it nearly impossible to bridge the rhetorical gap.

This division can’t continue; not with a recent national survey telling us 83% of Americans are still wary that reopening too soon will lead to additional infections. Not with that same poll telling us that support for public health restrictions imposed to control the virus’s spread is no longer overwhelming.

As one survey participant said: “Oh, I’d like to get my hair and nails done. It’s one of those little pleasures you take for granted. But I’m just going to suck it up. It’s not worth the risk.”

Making the reopening and rebuilding of our state about freedom versus public health is a false choice. One foisted on us by partisans more interested in their own selfish agendas than the public good. Don’t listen to them.

We all want to return to our beautiful beaches and parks. To give tired parents a break. To visit a restaurant or bar. To put our arms around a loved one that we’ve missed.

But no amount of yearning will make the virus disappear — not, at least, until a successful vaccine is developed. The truth is, Florida needs to embrace both our physical and economic health to navigate a lengthy path to a new normal. Masks in public places and generous amounts of hand sanitizer may be with us for a very long time.

Our economy is resilient, our businesses resourceful. Our new normal may not require much adjustment for building construction, but the same can’t be said for our prodigious real estate sales industry. Farming operations won’t have to change much in the fields, but packing houses have issues. While tourist attractions can spread crowds out more than they used to, hotels may have to monitor their patrons’ comings and goings more closely than before. And cleanliness, cleanliness, cleanliness.

We need to reopen, but together, in a manner that’s safe, smart — and slow, if need be.

This doesn’t have to be so hard.



Look for a fast housing recovery

PB County market took a hit under lockdown, but real estate pros say fundamentals will mean rapid return to health

By Tony Doris
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

WEST PALM BEACH — An artist's rendering shows a luxurious La Clara condo tower, its 26 stories reflecting in the glassy ripples of the Intracoastal Waterway off South Flagler Drive.

The real picture has been less serene. After months and millions spent on planning, design, approvals and the beginnings of construction, the project's sales center closed March 12, amid concerns of the coronavirus contagion spreading through Florida.

Nonetheless the sales staff pressed on, and on May 21 the center — across the water in Palm Beach, where many prospects reside — reopened, reflecting a real estate market whose numbers tumbled in April but whose fundamentals experts consider promising, despite the pandemic.

Across Palm Beach County, Realtors and homebuilders look to a post-pandemic market that regains strength more swiftly than after the 2008 recession and that reflects changes wrought by the downturn, from the growing popularity of virtual home-shopping to the broader acceptance of working at home.

Experts point to many variables, the unpredictability of the disease's spread most of all, that make it hard to say when the market will return to full strength. But they express little doubt that, when the government eases its pandemic prescriptions, good times will roll.

"Once we start opening up, it's going to make a big difference," said Jarrod Lowe, president of Broward, Palm Beaches & St. Lucie Realtors.

There's no question the Palm Beach County market has taken a big hit.

Statistics released May 21 by Florida Realtors, the statewide trade association, show a 54 percent drop in new pending sales last month. There were 947 new pending sales in April 2020



An artist's rendering of La Clara, the condominium tower planned for 1515 S. Flagler Drive in West Palm Beach. The sales center reopened May 21 [RENDERING PROVIDED]

in the county, compared with 2,087 in April 2019.

Amid soaring unemployment, many sellers took homes off the market and others chose not to list them in the first place.

The good news was that reduced supply, which helped raise the median sales price of homes by 4.3 percent, to \$365,000. The time it took a seller to get a home under contract fell to 29 days in April, from 55 days in April 2019.

The numbers offer "a perfect indication we're not seeing any type of market crisis," Lowe said. "It's just, the market slowed down. Not as many people have listed or purchased but the ones that

are ready and able to buy are out there buying."

Mostly, he said, "Everybody's just waiting. We're going to see a lot of pent-up buyers, as well as sellers."

Jay Huebner, president of Gulf Coast Builders Association, said the county's homebuilders appear to be turning a corner, despite having to shutter sales centers over the past two months. They never stopped building, he noted.

Huebner predicts a boom for builders in the fourth quarter, as businesses reopen, jobs return, low mortgage rates attract buyers and banks let them signed on the dotted line digitally.

Chris Leavitt, executive director of

Palm Beach County housing

- Statistics show a 54 percent drop in new pending April sales. There were 947 new pending sales in April 2020 in the county, compared with 2,087 in April 2019.
- Reduced supply helped raise the median sales price of homes by 4.3 percent, to \$365,000. The time it took a seller to get a home under contract fell to 29 days in April, from 55 days in April 2019.
- Despite a slowdown, many experts are predicting a boom for builders in the fourth quarter as businesses reopen, jobs return and low mortgage rates attract buyers.
- Sales centers are setting up cleaning stations with sanitizers and now offer digital tours and other tech techniques.

luxury sales at La Clara, said construction there continued and sales efforts never stopped during the two-month closing of his sales center.

His staff had sold about 25 of the building's 83 units before the center shut down and fielded two more offers during it. They kept up the pace through Zoom calls and escorted prospects via virtual tours, he said. "I took them out on their terraces on the 18th floor."

The building turned down two recent offers, not willing to discount luxury units priced from \$1.5 million to \$5 million. One of those prospects has since returned to the table, Leavitt said.

Typical of sales centers across the county, the center in Royal Poinciana Plaza is open by appointment only, with social distancing and hand sanitizing enforced, and masks available to clients.

Huebner said sales centers are setting up cleaning stations with sanitizers, and following Centers for Disease Control guidelines. They're using "touchless" communications — emails instead of pamphlets, he said.

Palm Beach Daily News Staff Writer Darrell Hofheinz contributed to this story.

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April was cruel for Florida real estate

But rebound expected to be 'very healthy,' with fresh emphasis on use of space

By Tony Doris
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

This isn't 2008. At least, not for Florida real estate.

Carefree lending didn't spur this economic crisis, skew demand or hyper-inflate prices. So the housing market wasn't crippled by the coronavirus pandemic, the experts say — it's waiting out the storm.

When stores, restaurants and the rest of the economy reopen, "it's going to get very healthy, very quickly," predicted Jarrod Lowe, president of Broward, Palm Beaches & St. Lucie Realtors.

That said, April data released by Florida Realtors on May 21 showed far lower sales statewide, compared to April 2019. Last month's closed sales of houses statewide dropped 20.7 percent year-over-year, totaling 21,403. Condo and townhouse sales declined 36.5 percent, for a total of 7,506.

On the other hand, with sellers pulling homes off the market, supply eased, helping median sale prices rise. The median price for a used house rose 6 percent, to \$275,000.

"We aren't seeing, because of COVID-19, a depression in price. We are seeing homes, if they're well-priced, holding firm," said Michael Saunders, CEO of Michael Saunders & Co., which serves Florida's Gulf Coast.

But overall, Florida Realtors President Barry Grooms said: "The impact of COVID-19 on Florida, the U.S. and throughout the world was fully realized in April."

The the road back is filled with uncertainties, the association's chief economist, Brad O'Connor, said.

As he put it: "There's a lot of 'buts' there."

Enough to cloud any prognosticator's crystal ball.

Still, it's clear that when residential and commercial markets come back into focus, life will have changed.

O'Connor, who has four children, chuckled that after months of lockdown, people might well decide they



The pandemic caused home sales to drop dramatically statewide but median prices rose. Realtors say that indicates the market is ready to spring back once the contagion subsides. [ALLEN EYESTONE/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]



Jarrod Lowe, president of Broward, Palm Beaches & St. Lucie Realtors. [CONTRIBUTED]

need bigger houses, bigger yards.

Open floor plans? Not so much, when there are kids running around the house and dad and mom are trying to work. Buyers also might want

rooms specifically designed for offices, O'Connor said.

"It's easy to realize how valuable space is when you're cooped up inside your house for weeks — and when the house becomes a workplace, school, restaurant and a place to live all in one, Saunders said.

As employers and employees nationwide have witnessed the ease with which one can work from home, expect reduced demand for traditional downtown office space.

That's bad news for office developers, but a potential savings for tenants, who now realize they need rent less square footage.

Meanwhile, it looks like historically low interest rates are here to stay, at least for the time being, as the Fed seeks to stimulate the economy.

Thanks to 30-year mortgage rates near 3.5 percent, Lowe said one of his clients now can afford \$27,000 more house than early last year, for the same monthly payment.

Shopping for that house also has changed, in this era of social-distancing, a change Realtors say will outlive the

Florida real estate

- April's closed sales of houses statewide dropped 20.7 percent year-over-year, totaling 21,403.
- April's condo and townhouse sales declined 36.5 percent, for a total of 7,506.
- Historically low 30-year mortgage rates are hovering near 3.5 percent and experts think that number is here to stay.
- With more people working from home, buyers might want rooms specifically designed for offices.
- As face-to-face interactions critical to homebuying became challenging, sales associates turned to virtual methods of marketing.

pandemic, thanks to high-tech home-touring efficiencies.

Take Southwest Florida Realtors, for example. As face-to-face interactions critical to homebuying became challenging, sales associates turned to virtual methods of marketing.

Fort Myers-based VIP Realty Group, for one, developed a real estate tool it calls, "Visit This House from Your Couch." With the trademarked program, VIP combined Nodalview, a 3D-tour platform for real estate, and Call Page, call-back provider software.

In Florida's premier mansion market, the town of Palm Beach, the pandemic has wrought a change in buyer motivation.

The town has long attracted wealthy buyers with year-round warm weather, a favorable tax climate and natural and architectural beauty.

Heading the list, though, always has been the island town's security and safety, said broker Linda Gary of Linda A. Gary Real Estate. That attraction no longer applies just to police protection, she said, but the margin of safety afforded by a community less crowded than northerners' pandemic-packed cities.

"We are getting so many calls from people who want homes here, especially from New York," Gary said.

Gannett staff writers Darrell Hofheinz, Laura Finaldi and Andrew Wigdor contributed to this article.

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New tools will help revive market

Virtual tours expected to grow in popularity

Paul Ivice
Special to Treasure Coast Newspapers
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

The real estate industry has been hard-hit — maybe harder than most — by the global coronavirus pandemic. Agents saw the bottom drop out of the market once the scope of the crisis became clear.

Brokers and their staffs already had been venturing into more innovative and creative approaches to selling homes, but when buyers and sellers both retreated into quarantine in March, business nearly ground to a halt.

Those innovative approaches, however, are beginning to pull the market back, and will help pave its way forward, according to Treasure Coast brokers and agents.

Using virtual tools is nothing new for Realtors, said John Slivon, manager of Bowen Realty’s Port St. Lucie office, “so, we have added another tool in the toolbox, making the experience for our consumer all that much better, and possibly easier.”

Slivon said it is especially helpful in selling for the second-home market.

“I have used this tool in the past and offer its use now. But the in-person inspection/preview of a property will continue to be a necessity,” he said.

According to John Falkenhagen, sales manager and broker-associate with Lang Realty in Port St. Lucie, “Virtual tours and video communication have been very popular and will play a much more significant role in the future.”

There already are examples of a real estate rebound, said Jeff Clark, president of the Martin County Realtors of the Treasure Coast.

“We’ve all felt to some significant degree the overall diminishment in market



Home sales are still continuing, shown by “For Sale” signs in front of a property in the Vero Highlands. KELLY ROGERS/TCPALM

activity,” Clark said.

Yet “morale remains strong because we’ve been through tough times before, and many of us adopted good habits around saving and streamlining costs during the Great Recession.”

Looking forward to the industry’s “new normal,” Clark noted he recently sold a home sight-unseen to an out-of-state buyer through a virtual tour.

“As far as adjusting to the technology, giving virtual showings to people out-of-state is a service many of us have used for years,” he said.

Realtors, though, are a resilient bunch, who have seen markets take a hit and then come back strong, Treasure Coast real estate professionals say.

Cindy O’Dare, broker-associate with Premier Estate Properties, which sells mostly high-end and waterfront properties in Indian River County, said activity has been picking up recently, especially with interest from potential buyers in the Northeast.

“The last two weeks have been ex-

tremely busy,” she said in an email, “with buyers from all major cities on the East Coast wanting to escape and find a safe, easy lifestyle.”

She’s optimistic: “I’ve sold several homes in the last two weeks and was quiet before the pandemic started. I expect a very busy summer here.”

While inquiries have decreased significantly since the pandemic began, Falkenhagen said, and the “quality of buyers” has improved.

The biggest difference in the market from a year ago is the rather sharp decline in available inventory of homes for sale, according to Slivon.

Jessica Bohner, president-broker of Premier Realty Group in Sewall’s Point, also cited declining inventory as a major factor.

For April, new-listing inventory in Martin County was down 55% to 60% compared with the same period last year, she said, but the decline looked significantly less for early May, more in the 10% range.

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Slivon compared the current situation to a post-hurricane market.

“During the disaster, all activity stops, and then when the storm passes, we pick up from where we left off,” he said.

“The big difference is that this storm has hit the entire nation.

“Will the out-of-state folks come down and help us out?” Slivon asked.

“I tend to believe we will see a big influx of northern urbanites flocking to Florida, escaping the dense and easily contagious environs of the cities.

“Like after 9/11, many folks left New York because of fear,” he said.

“We certainly could see this happen again.”

Paul Ivice is a local freelance writer. If you like articles like this and other TCPalm coverage of Treasure Coast news, please support our journalism and subscribe now.



Boating business looks to rebound

Florida’s industry one of hardest hit by pandemic

Ed Killer
Treasure Coast Newspapers
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

In Florida, with 961,266 registered vessels enjoying over 2,000 miles of tidal coastline, boating is a lifestyle. It’s also big business.

Following the Miami International Boat Show in mid-February, all indicators suggested 2020 was going to be a banner year for boat sales. Dealers and manufacturers were thrilled at the prospects of filling orders and enjoying a prosperous year.

Then came COVID-19. Like someone flipping a light switch, it all went dark. Now, as America begins to reopen and rebuild its economy, the lights are on, but some say they are still somewhat dim.

The last two months have sent the boat business adrift in uncharted waters. As the nation gets back to work, sellers like Brian Cunningham, co-owner of Vero Marine Center, a dealership for Grady White and Robalo boats, and boatbuilders like Larry Bonadeo, co-owner of Stuart-based Bonadeo Boatworks, custom builders of Mercury Outboard-powered center consoles and walkarounds, are both unsure what will happen in the coming weeks, months and years.

Nautical distancing

At Vero Marine Center, Cunningham said instead of social distancing, he prefers to call it “nautical distancing.”

“I like to say everyone has to stay one fathom apart,” said Cunningham, whose Indian River County dealership has served the Treasure Coast boating community since 1958.

Over the decades Cunningham has been guiding customers towards their



The Pursuit Boats DC 326, one of its newest models, is one of 15 built at the company’s manufacturing facility in Fort Pierce. MARC MONTOCCHIO FOR PURSUIT

boating dreams, he has seen numerous ups and downs in the economy. Some affected his business profoundly.

Recessions. High gas prices. Elevated interest rates. Periods when financing was virtually unavailable. Hurricanes. The 9/11 attacks. But a global pandemic?

It’s a first for Cunningham. To him, it could perhaps be the most difficult to forecast what its outcome will be.

“These are the most uncertain times,” he said. “We’re dealing with a lot of stuff we’ve never dealt with before. There is so much information out there, but everyone is not on the same page. That’s what makes it challenging to understand what will happen.”

Cunningham said the phrase, “We’re all in this together,” is being used seemingly everywhere. He says that may be true, however, what he sees is that people are not handling it the same way.

“There doesn’t seem to be a unified feeling about how to come out of this economic slump,” Cunningham said. “We’re not unified on how to proceed.”

As for the boating business, Cunningham said the attitude pre-virus was

encouraging.

“From the last week of January up through the first 10 days of March, I’ve never seen the enthusiasm for going boating,” Cunningham said. “Then, it just stopped for two weeks.”

But, Cunningham said, in April it began to come back again. Sales were brisk. He even worried about running out of inventory before the model year was up. But COVID-19 concerns forced his business to conduct sales and service with some changes.

The front door is locked and customers enter through the side door. Signs mark areas where customers are allowed. Staff wear masks and some work from home. Hours have been cut down. The service area has a glass partition. Cunningham says the measures are working.

Custom questions

Bonadeo said this year was the best Miami Boat Show his small company, founded in 2004, ever had. He sold a 45-foot walkaround and had solid sales

leads for numerous qualified potential clients.

He said his 13-person crew is working on one boat and may be able to begin construction on a second one. In the custom boatbuilding sector of the marine economy, projects are completed at a rate of 1-2 a year. Custom builders of larger boats, like Jim Smith, Willis Marine or American Custom Yachts, may take more than two years to build one boat. Production builders like Fort Pierce-based Maverick Boat Group and Pursuit Boats, which employ 200-400 employees apiece, may roll out two dozen boats per week each.

Bonadeo said repair work and customizations of boats people already own is helping keep his business open.

“Coming out of this, it’s hard to say what will happen,” Bonadeo said. “The phone isn’t ringing the way I had hoped it would. We’re working the sales leads we got from Miami as hard as we can. People are waiting to see what the stock market will do.”

The boatbuilding business on the Treasure Coast is so robust and has such a history one could rename it “The Fiberglass Belt.” More than 30 boatbuilders manufacture more than 40 brands of boats here.

It’s a significant portion of the nation’s boatbuilding economy. According to the National Marine Manufacturers Association, 280,000 boats were sold nationally in 2019 supporting 35,000 marine business. Boating produces \$778 billion of economic output nationally.

Both men said they were able to avoid closing their doors during the pandemic. Pursuit Boats furloughed its work force for two weeks with pay, but is fully operational again.

Ed Killer is TCPalm’s outdoors writer. Become a valued customer by subscribing to TCPalm. To interact with Ed, friend him on Facebook at Ed Killer, follow him on Twitter @tcpalmekiller or email him at ed.killer@tcpalm.com.

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Banks remain open with limited service

Lenders are still working on strategies to reopen

By John Hielscher
john.hielscher@heraldtribune.com

After closing 2019 in solid shape, the Southwest Florida banking industry is confronting new challenges from the coronavirus crisis.

All four community banks based in Sarasota and Charlotte counties improved their earnings in the first quarter of 2020, although that was before the brunt of the economic shutdown.

Those banks are the primary lenders to a number of the region’s small businesses, some of which temporarily closed operations during the pandemic. Analysts say if those businesses can’t recover, the banks will see higher levels of bad loans.

Banks of all sizes in the Sarasota-Manatee region reacted to the crisis by closing some branches and limiting service at others to drive-ins and appointment-only meetings with customers. Banks have yet to disclose any specific dates on when they will reopen their branch networks.

Local bankers have been busy teaching their customers how to navigate unfamiliar electronic banking systems, as well as processing emergency-relief loans for their small business clients.

“We’re all in this together, and our clients and teammates alike have adjusted to the enhanced safety protocols as we’ve modified our branch operations to continue supporting our clients’ banking needs during this challenging time,” said Cynthia Montgomery, spokeswoman at Truist Bank, the newly combined SunTrust and BB&T banks. “Our clients are increasingly taking advantage of all of the options available to them, including digital solutions like online banking, mobile deposits and Zelle payments.”

On May 2 the bank resumed Saturday drive-thru service at some branches.

Wells Fargo, one of the largest banks by deposits in the Sarasota-Manatee area, plans through at least June 30 to maintain its current operating model, which includes bankers working from home and restricted service at branches that remain open.

“We do not yet know when our business-as-usual activities will resume,” said spokesman Jacob Jordan. “We are creating a thoughtful, phased plan for returning to the workplace, and we will



What to expect

Banks for now will continue to offer limited service at branches, restricting inside access and focusing on drive-ins and ATMs. Customers are encouraged to use learn and utilize online or mobile banking, through which they can make deposits and pay bills. When they reopen, banks may require customers to take temperature checks, wear masks and use hand sanitizers. Many auto insurers will issue credits or refunds to policyholders who have cut back on driving during the stay-at-home orders.

Sabal Palm Bank of Sarasota, led by president/CEO Neil D. McCurry Jr., offered borrowers an “interest only” payment program during the coronavirus pandemic.
[HERALD-TRIBUNE ARCHIVE/ 2018]

use guidance from health experts to maintain a safe workplace for all employees, including those who have continued to work from the office and those who will be returning to the office over the course of time.

“For the time being, temporarily closed branches remain closed. We may soon consider on a case-by-case basis reopening some branches with limited service. At our open branches, we are keeping in place measures to ensure we can serve our customers and keep our branches safe, including utilizing drive ups where we have them, social distancing measures and staggering staff and shifts,” he said.

New strategies for a new era

As banks plot their re-opening strategies, new policies may include requiring masks for both customers and employees; temperature checks at entrances; hygiene practices such as sanitizing supplies; bankers and clients permitted in specific spaces; and temperature checks at the bank entrance and legal requirements around that data.

Some lenders have responded with a helping hand.

Sabal Palm Bank of Sarasota was one of the first banks in the country to offer loan customers an “interest only” payment program through the end of the year. The \$253.7-million-asset lender expected to forgo \$6 million in loan payments.

“Our hope is the modification of loan payments to the end of the year will allow individuals and small businesses to have additional financial resources to use toward other vital needs such as child care, medical expenses and other critical expenses for individuals,” bank president Neil McCurry said when rolling out the program. “For small businesses it can help offset declining revenues, assist with payroll and other fixed expenses.”

Local banks also have been active in the federal Paycheck Protection Program, or PPP, which allowed small businesses to obtain low-cost loans to fund their payroll and other operating costs.

Possible insurance savings

Meanwhile, Southwest Florida drivers

could be getting a break on their car insurance.

Many of the nation’s largest auto insurers, such as State Farm, Geico and Liberty Mutual, are offering policyholders refunds and credits to save money, totaling more than \$6.5 billion over the next two months, according to the Consumer Federation of America.

That relief from insurers will come in the form of refunds, credits or one-time payments. Most will be applied automatically through the policyholder’s recent payment method on file.

For now, the financial condition of banks and credit unions is “possibly the strongest we have seen in our lifetime,” said Karen Dorway, president of industry rater BauerFinancial.

“That will prove to be invaluable as we come to grips with the full impact of COVID-19,” Dorway said. “Federal and state regulators are encouraging the financial institutions to do whatever they can to meet the financial needs of their customers and members and to minimize the adverse financial effects as we navigate our way around and through this virus.”

Pandemic upends how we work and spend

Americans may put off purchases, retirement

Paul Davidson and Jessica Menton
USA TODAY

Wynne Beckmann has worked in retail for 13 years, through the upheaval of the Great Recession a decade ago. But getting furloughed from her job at a Westchester, New York, mall in March felt different.

“This is an eye-opener. I don’t know how much longer I can do retail,” says Beckmann, a 32-year-old assistant manager at LOFT, a women’s clothing store. “If things don’t change, I’ll have to take my marketing degree somewhere else. Maybe Amazon or Glossier, somewhere that puts e-commerce first.”

Long after the public health threat posed by the COVID-19 pandemic eases, the crisis could spur lasting changes in how Americans work, spend, save and invest, experts say.

Many like Beckmann are grappling with a future that may mean fewer jobs at stores and restaurants and more technology positions. It’s a future where a generation of shaken young Americans may pull back on spending and older workers put off retirement to replenish depleted nest eggs.

“I think this is a life-changing event,” says Mark Zandi, chief economist of Moody’s Analytics. “People are shell-shocked.”

In March, most states issued stay-at-home orders and shut down nonessential businesses to curb the spread of the virus, largely shuttering restaurants, malls, theaters and factories. The ripple effects resulted in a record 20.5 million layoffs in April and a 14.7% unemployment rate, highest since the Great Depression.

As many as 10 million more job cuts are expected in May, pushing unemployment to about 20%, before the economy could begin to recover as early as June.



Thirty percent of adults have seen their household income fall as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, according to a Bankrate survey. GETTY IMAGES

But the rebound is likely to be halting. Many Americans remain fearful of contracting the virus until a vaccine is widely available, possibly by the second half of next year. They’re expected to return to restaurants and other gathering spots warily.

The crisis could leave enduring damage. Although about 90% of unemployed workers in April said they were on temporary layoff, some economists worry that many won’t be called back.

Spending and saving

American households have significantly cut their spending and increased their savings during the crisis. They socked away 13% of their income in March, up from 8% in February and highest since 1981, government figures show. In April, sales fell 79% at clothing stores, 61% at electronics and appliance stores, and 59% at furniture outlets.

Much of the drop-off isn’t surprising considering most restaurants and stores were closed. But with 39 million

Americans laid off, furloughed or forced to work fewer hours, 30% of adults have seen their household income fall, according to a recent Bankrate survey. Despite squirreling away more of their income, nearly one in five adults have less in emergency savings than before the pandemic.

Michelle Liu, a sales associate at Dillard’s department store in Charlotte, North Carolina, saw her hours cut in mid-March when the pandemic hit. Then the 36-year-old, who works at the SouthPark shopping mall, was furloughed within a matter of weeks.

Liu, who had been stashing money away for school and dental work, struggled to receive unemployment checks for over a month and was forced to pull from her savings to help pay insurance premiums, along with groceries and car repairs for her father.

“It’s been hard. My savings have completely dropped,” Liu says. “Now I have to start from scratch.”

Liu, who was initially furloughed until at least July, has now been asked to

return to work. But she’s anxious.

The financial blow from job losses like Liu’s could spawn a more cautious mindset, especially for college grads as well as millennials whose careers were detoured when they entered the workforce during the Great Recession and now face another setback.

“Saving and risk-taking will probably change for a whole generation,” says Andrew Chamberlain, chief economist of Glassdoor, the job posting site.

Jobs

Both restaurants and theaters could see fewer patrons because of less demand and more spacing requirements between tables or seats. Kuznetsova expects growth in dine-in movie theaters, perhaps with some restaurants and theaters merging. That will mean fewer jobs over the long term. At the same time, she foresees a possible renaissance in drive-in movie theaters, providing new jobs.

Zandi expects retailers to install ordering kiosks and other automated systems to increase productivity and better withstand another downturn, a strategy that would further reduce jobs.

The move to online banking during the shutdown is also likely to endure to some extent, requiring fewer employees at branches, a McKinsey study says.

Retirement planning

Many workers’ retirement savings plans have taken a hit. The Standard & Poor’s 500 index is 15% below its Feb. 19 peak. In late March, 63% of workers were confident about having enough money to live comfortably in retirement, down from 69% in January, according to a survey by the Employee Benefit Research Institute.

Among those laid off or furloughed – or who expected to be in the next six months – just 47% said they were confident in their retirement finances.

Contributing: Dalvin Brown

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Where — and how — to buy home evolving

Video tours, suburbs vs. cities highlight changes

Charisse Jones and Jessica Menton
USA TODAY

Jessica Chamorro's dream of owning her first home was upended in March after she was furloughed from her catering job at a hotel chain in Tampa, Florida.

She and her husband, who have three children, had just started their pre-approval process to purchase a home this summer when the pandemic hit. Now their plans have been put on hold after the hotel industry was battered by travel restrictions and lockdowns. They are currently stuck in a 1,000-square-foot rental that they had been staying in temporarily to stash money away for a down payment.

"I feel like the rug has been pulled out from under us," Chamorro, 38, says. "Our goal was to get out. Now we're stuck in this tiny house. It worries me because we were already living on top of each other to save money. I don't know if I'll even have a job to go back to."

Like Chamorro, millennials and other younger Americans starting families and hitting their professional stride were poised this spring to achieve another milestone — buying their first home. Then the coronavirus hit, shuttering open houses, delaying deals, and causing would-be buyers to push pause as they worried about their health and the fate of their jobs.

Now, applications to buy a home are again on the rise as states lift orders to stay inside. But the pandemic has altered how residential property is bought and sold, changes that aren't likely to disappear any time soon and that could reshape the American dream long after the current crisis has passed.

The new reality will greet many of the buyers and sellers easing back into a thawing market.

Mortgage applications dropped 25%



The coronavirus pandemic has changed how we buy and sell homes. GETTY IMAGES

in April as compared to the month before, and were 12% below their total during the same month last year, as stay-at-home mandates reached their peak, according to the Mortgage Bankers Association.

But millennials remain eager to buy a place of their own, experts say. And with interest rates hovering at 3.41%, a near record low, a housing rebound could start as soon as this summer.

"You still have a lot of households at the point where they're interested in home buying," says Mike Fratantoni, chief economist for the MBA. "As some states have begun to reopen, we've seen a rapid pickup and ... very strong growth in purchase applications. And now we're running only about 10% behind where we were last year."

In Texas, North Carolina and Georgia, purchase applications have actually risen in comparison to 2019. And Fratantoni expects home sales for all of 2020 to be only 2% below last year.

"It all depends on how the pandemic evolves from here," he says, but current-

ly, the future of home sales is "looking really, surprisingly strong."

The National Association of Realtors is slightly less optimistic about this year's forecast, predicting home sales will be 10% to 15% lower than 2019.

But "sales will be higher by 15% to 20% in 2021 because more listings will steadily appear as the state economies steadily reopen," says Lawrence Yun, NAR's chief economist.

Head for the hills — or at least the suburbs

A growing number of those sales might be in less crowded communities.

A survey by NAR found that 5% of members said the coronavirus pandemic was causing their clients to shift their sights away from cities to the suburbs.

And 13% said the virus had made buyers prioritize a different home feature, such as a home office, or extra room where relatives could stay, as they considered what property to buy.

"Remote work will become more

prevalent," Yun said of the home buying landscape in the wake of COVID-19. "That means there is less need to be close to the job centers. Suburbs and exurbs (areas situated beyond the suburbs and in, or adjacent to, rural areas) will get a greater interest. In addition, a larger single-family home with extra elbow room will be desired, such as dedicated office space and a personal gym."

Buying online, using a virtual notary

Those who are able to buy a home may find that much, if not all, of the process has gone virtual. Brokers have been able to use FaceTime and other platforms to give video tours of houses for years.

But those tools became critical during the pandemic when sellers became reluctant to have strangers traipsing through their homes.

Among sellers with active listings, the NAR survey found 68% wanted prospective buyers to use hand sanitizer, to use coverings for their shoes and face, or to wash their hands before entering their homes. When it came to home inspectors, 53% of sellers wanted them to take similar safety measures.

Brokerages like Redfin, which has offices in more than 90 metro areas across the U.S. and Canada, canceled open houses as the coronavirus crisis escalated. And video walk-throughs became a common substitute for in-person visits.

NAR's May survey found that among members who had a buyer put a contract on a home that week, 22% said the purchaser had only seen the property virtually.

But live walk-throughs are not likely to disappear, says Scott Elwell, Douglas Elliman Real Estate's regional vice president of sales for Westchester County, New York, and New England.

"Nothing will replace the experience of walking through a house and property," Elwell says.

Contributing: Michael Braga



A new way to watch (and hear) live sports

Expect innovation with stadiums, arenas empty

Jeff Zillgitt, Bob Nightengale and Jarrett Bell
USA TODAY

Watching live sports on TV without fans is like a ballpark frank without mustard. You need the cheers after a great play and the boos from the disappointed home fans. You need that obnoxious fan behind the visitor's bench or the fan holding a clever sign.

Fans are integral to watching sports. Or are they?

As leagues look to return during the coronavirus pandemic, fans won't be in attendance at least at the start, and that will be strange. But we're living in strange times.

How will sports look, sound and feel on TV in the U.S. when play resumes? A few clues can be found from baseball in South Korea and soccer in Germany.

"We're not going to fool anybody with no fans," ESPN senior vice president of production and remote events, including baseball, Mark Gross said. "It's a live baseball game. Our job is to televise the game, and to make it as compelling to watch as we can with the obstacles of no crowds."

Leagues and college conferences, along with their TV partners, are grappling with three main components: how to compensate for empty arenas and stadiums, fan engagement and player and coach audio.

They're also considering how many production people will need to be on location, how many camera angles to use and whether announcers will call games on site or from an off-site studio.

"So many sports have started to go that way, so many Olympic sports," TV sports reporter Andrea Kremer said. "In Sochi and Rio (Olympics), they were being commented from a studio in Stamford, (Connecticut) where NBC (Sports) is located."



Cardboard pictures of fans replaced actual fans as German soccer club Borussia Moenchengladbach played host to Bayer 04 Leverkusen. INA FASSBENDER, AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Leagues and networks have not pinpointed how it will look and sound as they explore ideas. The viewing experience likely will evolve as games are played as some ideas work, some fail and new ones are introduced.

"We're really focused on the best possible experience for our fans wherever and however they're watching our games and trying to bring that community feeling to watching games even if fans are apart," NBA senior director of domestic programming and content strategy Sara Zuckert said. "We're looking at ways to bring fans together digitally and to give them ways to interact with what's going on in the venue and in the telecast to make them feel more connected."

Now is an excellent time to experiment with new and emerging technologies, and leagues have talked with multiple tech companies. Leagues were already exploring some of these ideas before the pandemic.

But the most interesting aspect to fans, especially for the NBA: player audio.

As much as sports is visual, it's also audible, and in a fan-less environment, fans want access to the interactions among players, coaches and referees.

Who doesn't want to hear the chatter, trash talk, complaints, strategy and some colorful language?

When asked about broadcasting those interactions as they happen for fans watching on TV to hear, the NBA's Zuckert said, "Unlike the other sports, we're positioned a little bit differently in that we have music during our games in normal times. I do think that music and audio will still come through on the telecast in that respect."

The NBA may use music and other sound, such as artificial noise, to mask some of what is said live.

Also, coaches may not want everything they say in huddles during timeouts aired. When Golden State coach Steve Kerr told Kevin Durant a Michael Jordan story during a timeout of a playoff game — Kerr implored Durant to trust his teammates — it was compelling coach-player talk. But Kerr wasn't thrilled it was aired.

It's possible the NBA televises more of those conversations during a break in play — after producers have had time to make sure the language is safe for all ages and strategy isn't revealed.

Fred Gaudelli, executive producer of NBC's *Sunday Night Football*, said he understands the interest in hearing what's said on the field. He also knows he may not have the autonomy to broadcast everything.

"One of the technological advances to having no crowd is that you'll hear the signals," Gaudelli said. "You'll hear the offensive signals, you'll hear the defensive signals, you'll hear coaches yelling. You'll be able to hear all of that."

"Now, will the NFL put protocols in place to limit that? I don't know because it's going to be the same for every game and for every team. So, there's no competitive advantage or disadvantage, and I'm sure some teams will probably adjust to that and do things as if they're on

the road all the time — where all the communications are hand signals, and the (snap) count is silent and all that.

"We definitely plan to take advantage of anything that is presented to us if you can even say there is one for not having people in the stands."

MLB would love to have more players mic'd up when games return, but that's an issue that must be resolved between the league and players association.

"When it comes to mic'ing players, certainly, we like to mic the players as much as we can," Gross said. "The feedback we got from viewers (in spring training) has been great."

The adjustment to seeing empty arenas and stadiums will take time, and invested parties are working on ways to counterbalance that. It might be something as simple as concealing the lower bowl of an arena or stadium with a tarp-like cover to hide empty seats, allowing networks to either run advertising, images or messages.

The Korean Baseball Organization placed placards featuring drawings of fans in masks throughout the stadium, and Germany's Bundesliga used cardboard cutouts of actual fan faces, costing about \$20 per fan to have their face placed in a stadium seat. KBO also used similar cutouts.

The use of virtual fans is also a possibility, and there are tech companies that can produce that. Players on the court won't likely won't be able to see those virtual fans, but viewers at home could. However, that is costly and may not be possible to do all game every game.

Another possibility: using a Zoom-like app in the arena or stadium to show fans watching from home — similar to the screen used at NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell's house for April's NFL Draft.

"We want to bring fans the best possible look and feel of the game and the most engaging game that we can," Zuckert said, "and still create that genuine feeling even if by nature things wind up looking slightly different."

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Restaurants find hope in the outdoors

In South Florida, industry confident independents will make strong comeback

By Liz Balmaseda
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Is the local restaurant scene, devastated by the coronavirus shutdown, heading into summer as an al fresco society defined by café tables scattered in spaces once reserved for deliveries and parking?

When it comes to struggling restaurants in the wake of the shutdown, the new attraction might be what’s happening outside. Hoping to attract wary customers who want a dining experience that allows for proper social distancing, many eateries are touting their outdoor charms as they press through the initial phases of reopening.

Of course, open-air dining is a touted feature rooted in some wishful thinking, given the inevitable summer heat and storms. But if the past two months have taught local restaurants anything, it is to ditch the predictions and look to the here-and-now.

Chef Tim Lipman, who owns the popular Palm Beach Gardens spots Coolinary Café and The Parched Pig bar, says he feels like he and his staff are “kind of in the dark” about the bigger picture.

But now that the state has shifted into the full Phase 1 of the reopening process, allowing restaurants to open dining rooms at 50 percent of their maximum occupancy, Lipman says he can envision “brighter skies.” The increase in capacity from the initial 25 percent means a nightly boost to his 1,000-square-foot dining room at Coolinary.

Some local independent restaurant owners like Lipman are pushing back on the most extreme of predictions about their industry, especially those that conjure a drab landscape of national chain restaurants in the post-coronavirus years. Those predictions won’t come true because local customers, devoted to the county’s indie dining scene, won’t stand for it, some experts say.

Ralph Lewis, whose iconic Okeechobee Steakhouse has been in the family for nearly 73 years, says it’s local love that now boosts independently owned restaurants as they strive for normalcy. “It’s stronger than ever,” he says.

Restaurant owners are also finding



People dine outside at Rocco’s Tacos as part of the “Dining on the Spot” initiative to increase outdoor seating on Clematis Street.
[PHOTOS BY GREG LOVETT/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]

Dining Overview

- More open-air dining options are sprouting across the county due to a combination of factors: Customers seek places where they can practice social distancing. Restaurants need to maximize seating due to capacity restrictions.
- Restaurants are focusing on short-term goals to survive the reopening phases.
- Industry experts say restaurants that are willing to pivot to new models and tap into creative solutions are more apt to survive.
- South Florida’s diverse demographics could be a game-changer for the local restaurant industry, where diners seek the authentic and have shown love for independently owned restaurants.

support from some local cities, especially when it comes to outdoor-dining endeavors. One picturesque effort has filled Clematis Street with on-street, umbrella-shaded tables. The new al fresco installation, the brainchild of West Palm Beach’s Downtown Development Authority, permits restaurants to serve customers at parking-space and alleyway tables as well as other designated public areas. That means an additional 350 customers could be served on the 200 block of Clematis Street alone, according to Raphael Clemente, the DDA’s executive director.

Lake Worth Beach has allowed restaurant seating to extend into some side-street parking spaces. Boca Raton’s

Mizner Park got city approval for its restaurants to place tables along part of its adjacent streets. It’s a different story in Delray Beach, where code enforcement officers have targeted restaurants who have placed tables in previously unauthorized areas. But city officials there, too, are exploring al fresco possibilities.

Another plus for the local restaurant world is diversity, both in restaurant offerings and in community demographics as diners flock to the authentic. This combination of factors could make many South Florida restaurants more resilient to the crisis, says Michael Cheng, dean of Florida International University’s Chaplin School of Hospitality and Tourism Management.



Patrons dine at Rocco’s Tacos on May 19 during downtown West Palm’s new “Dining on the Spot” initiative.

Local independent restaurants exemplify the “creativity, innovation and entrepreneurial spirit” that runs throughout South Florida. “It’s that spirit that will get our restaurant industry rebirthed,” says Cheng.

In some ways, the quarantine phase may prove beneficial to some eateries during summer months, when the off-season slump usually rolls in.

“Some people from the north didn’t go back. They’re still here, and that’s good for us,” says chef Julien Gremaud, who owns Avocado Grill, a global small-plates concept with locations in West Palm Beach and Palm Beach Gardens. “Who knows, this could be our best summer yet.”

Chefs face struggles to get diners to return

Eateries juggle safety with being welcoming

Trevor Hughes
USA TODAY

Former “Top Chef” contestant Carrie Baird’s new restaurant was open for just seven days when the coronavirus outbreak prompted health officials to order an immediate halt to in-person dining across Colorado.

She was still finessing the menu at Rose’s Classic Americana, including her signature Fancy Toast, when she was forced to close. Now, she’s trying to figure out how to reopen as health rules relax and diners begin returning to restaurants across the country.

For many Americans tired of baking sourdough and eating their own cooking, those restaurants reopening in the coming weeks will look different than before.

“We always say that food’s the easy part,” says Baird, 40, who was also a 2019 finalist for a James Beard “Best Chef” award. “I’m confident I can deliver you a meal you can’t recreate at home. But all the other parts? That’s a lot harder. The days of ‘Cheers’ and sitting down at a bar and rubbing elbows with a stranger and shooting the s--- are going to be over.”

A study by reservation service OpenTable indicated that as many as 25% of restaurants nationally may never reopen, the victim of razor-thin margins even under the best of times.

The National Restaurant Association says its members lost \$30 billion in March and \$50 billion in April, staggering losses for an industry that employed about 12 million people before the outbreak. Many of the country’s restaurant employees were the first to lose their jobs and some restaurateurs are struggling to entice back workers who’ve found the \$600 weekly federal unemployment payments – on top of their state’s unemployment payment – more



Caroline Glover, the chef-owner of Annette Scratch to Table restaurant in Aurora, Colorado, prepares dough for baking during the coronavirus outbreak.
TREVOR HUGHES/USA TODAY

lucrative, never mind safer.

Experts say most restaurants will need to find a happy medium between taking safety precautions and creating a welcoming environment. After all, most people who eat out are seeking a social experience.

“It will be different. It will feel different. It will look different,” said Larry Lynch, a longtime food-safety expert and a senior vice president of the National Restaurant Association. “It’s already proven that restaurants can effectively and safely prepare food. In terms of the actual preparation of food, we know that works. It’s the front of the house where the changes become more obvious.”

The federal government has issued guidelines for restaurants and bars that call for them to follow state and local rules, encourage social distancing while dining, and recommends checking workers for illness when feasible.

The Restaurant Association has now

released its own guidelines and a training video explaining what it considers to be best practices, including cleaning regimens, distancing suggestions and mask protocols. And states are developing their own rules: Florida, for instance, has already permitted restaurants to reopen as long as they limit occupancy to 25% of their usual capacity. And in Wyoming, restaurants must limit groups to no more than six, and tables must be at least six feet apart.

Almost every state allowing restaurants to reopen is also requiring frequent cleaning and sanitation, although Wisconsin reopened with no restrictions in place after the state Supreme Court overruled the governor’s quarantine orders.

Lynch and other experts described how a typical sit-down dining experience might unfold for most diners across the country: You’ll make a reservation in advance, and potentially even place your order then. Once you arrive at the

restaurant, you’ll wait in your vehicle or outside until a text tells you it’s time to come in, and you’ll be immediately seated at a table with hand sanitizer, distanced from other diners.

Your server, who might bring your utensils only after you’ve been seated, may only return to clear the table once, and perhaps another time to ensure you’ve got water to drink. There won’t be any self-service buffets or soda machines. Once you’ve paid – preferably with a credit card or phone – you might leave the restaurant by a different door than the one you entered.

And pretty much every person you see will be wearing a mask.

Everything, Lynch said, will be designed to reduce interactions between and among guests and staff.

“We’ll lose some of that face-to-face contact but we’ll make sure you’re feeling safe,” he said. “Every conversation I’ve had since we started working on this is ‘how do I reassure the customers.’”

Some restaurants see safety concerns as a way to differentiate themselves. The company that owns Burger King, Tim Hortons and Popeyes, for instance, wants the public to know that every worker has their temperature taken when arriving. Experts say full-service restaurants will likely struggle at first because they require patrons to step into a space that’s been off-limits for months: a dining room.

In Denver, chef Caroline Glover is struggling with the same choices: When should she reopen her award-winning restaurant Annette for in-person dining? During the shutdowns, she and her staff switched to serving takeout meals of fried chicken, burgers and pork chops at about half their normal volume. A Small Business Administration loan has helped keep her afloat, but she worries that reopening too soon could expose a customer or employee to infection.

“Everybody’s scared, and for good reason,” she said. “People might feel they are literally risking their lives to eat out.”

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South Florida teams tread carefully back into action

Dolphins hold Zoom meetings; soccer trains under strict rules

By Hal Habib
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

It was only weeks ago that if you asked Dolphins defensive tackle Davon Godchaux what he thought of Zoom, you would have gotten a blank stare.

“I never even knew they had something called Zoom,” he said.

He does now. So do his teammates. They know how to get their cameras cranked up, how to unmute themselves and certainly how to access the “raise hand” function.

From 1 to 3 p.m. on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, the Dolphins have held meetings via Zoom, one of many baby steps sports in South Florida are taking as they awoken from a coronavirus pandemic-induced slumber.

Yes, we will have sports again. Listen closely and you can hear the sound of basketballs hitting the hardwood in Miami. Soon, if things go according to the wishes of the governor — not to mention every optimistic coach, player and fan around — that will be followed by fastballs smacking catchers’ mitts, hockey sticks whacking pucks and, yes, Tua Tagovailoa raising the curtain on the most-anticipated career of any athlete in South Florida in recent memory.

That’s the hope, anyway. The reality? Nobody can say. In a sports world where you can already find mock NFL drafts for 2021, there’s a reason to tread carefully when it comes to predicting what the rest of 2020 might look like for Dolphins and Hurricanes, for Florida Panthers and Dwyer High Panthers.

Gov. Ron DeSantis declared Florida open for business for pro sports teams to train and compete; but each county, each league and each team will dictate its pace. In general, that pace is best described as cautious.

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell has mandated that the Dolphins’ training facility in Davie, like the 31 others across the league, will open in phases. First are



Inter Miami CF goalkeeper Luis Robles arrives in a mask during voluntary individual workouts in Fort Lauderdale. [MLS VIA USA TODAY SPORTS]



Dolphins fans will be eager to see first-round draft pick Tua Tagovailoa in action as soon as possible. [NFL VIA AP]

a limited number of staffers but later, coaches and players.

In place of spring rookie camp and OTAs have been the Zoom meetings.

For an in-depth look at what the phasing-in process looks like, the greatest

transparency comes from Inter Miami, the expansion Major League Soccer club owned by David Beckham. It’s a good bet that at least some of Inter Miami’s procedures will be used by others.

“It’s a tedious one but it’s an important

What to expect as sports resume

Health checks of players before practices and games
Fewer fans, if any, at games
Increased sanitation by teams

one because we want to make sure we’re exercising every safety precaution,” goalkeeper Luis Robles said of the multi-step process.

Players first must pass a questionnaire attesting to their health. Those who pass are instructed to put on their mask as they leave for daily training. Their temperature is taken as they drive into the facility. Only then can they park, leaving three empty spaces next to them.

They enter the practice field through one of two entry points and go to the section of the field assigned only to them (it’s divided into quadrants). Then they put on cleats. All the equipment players use — cones, balls, gloves — is sanitized.

Coaches can attend but must maintain social distancing. Trainers wear PPE. Players leave in the order in which they arrived and cannot go indoors, not even to use the restroom.

Robles called it “a bit of a tease.” Sporting Director Paul McDonough called it essential.

Nobody knows when the doors to arenas and stadiums will reopen to fans. Dolphins CEO Tom Garfinkel outlined a possible set of plans that would enable 15,000 fans into Hard Rock Stadium while practicing social distancing.

A more immediate concern is how the club can safely hold an event to celebrate the life of former coach Don Shula, who died May 4. Until now, a drive-up event at the Shula statue at Hard Rock Stadium has been the only major in-person availability for fans to pay their respects.

Just as quickly as the sports world discovered Zoom, it also is being reminded there are many things that can’t be replicated in a virtual world.

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Sports could serve as ‘great PR for Florida’

Leagues playing here would mark a key step forward

By Hal Habib
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

In order to stage a pay-per-view card in Jacksonville, UFC put together a document on health and safety protocols.

It was 25 pages long.

About the same time, Major League Baseball was dipping its toe into the reopening of the sports world, although in this case, it’s more of an opening, since the 2020 season never got off the ground before the coronavirus pandemic shut down sports.

MLB’s document? It was a cool 67 pages. And it was just a draft.

When Spring Training 2.0 unfurls in Florida, there will be no exchanging of high-fives by players or lineup cards by managers. Spitting, as much a fixture in baseball as bubblegum, is banned. The plan is so detailed that MLB is telling teams to seek lower-level rooms in hotels. Why? To encourage the use of stairs instead of elevators.

Nobody knows if it’ll work. What is known is that both President Donald Trump and his supporter, Gov. Ron DeSantis, see the return of sports in

What to expect for Florida sports

Florida leading the nation in hosting live sports
Detailed plans on how sports leagues and organizations plan to restart
Complexes, such as ESPN’s Wide World of Sports in Orlando, hosting regular-season games in certain team sports

Florida as a key step forward.

“We believe getting sports back online is important for the nation’s mojo,” DeSantis said.

DeSantis is beginning to win over Richard Lapchick, director of the DeVos Sport Business Management program at the University of Central Florida and the director of The Institute for Diversity & Ethics in Sport.

“When I first heard the governor’s decision to reopen the state I thought it was premature,” Lapchick wrote in an e-mail to The Post. “However, it now looks like it was almost a signal to the leagues that it’s time to resume professional sports. It reminded me of the way the NBA’s decision led to everybody shutting down. I think sports have a history of bringing people together in times

of crisis. I hope that the resumption of sports will do that in these unprecedented times.”

It wasn’t lost on DeSantis that the UFC 249 card originally was planned for New York. DeSantis hopes Florida can lure many others.

Several have Florida on their radar. The NHL could finish its regular season with a round-robin series involving six teams in four hubs. Tampa reportedly could host the Lightning and Florida Panthers in addition to Boston, Toronto, the New York Rangers and Montreal. Major League Soccer and the NBA also reportedly are considering Orlando hubs.

“ESPN’s Wide World of Sports is a great resource for the state at so many levels and this could be yet another,” Lapchick wrote. “Indirectly, if all goes well it will be great PR for Florida and send a signal to potential tourists that they can start to come back to Florida to enjoy all that Florida has to offer.”

As soon as DeSantis began green-lighting sports, Scott Stricklin, athletic director at the University of Florida, sprung into action.

“I reached out to remind him UF and Gainesville have world-class healthcare facilities, an iconic football stadium, a

state-of-the-art basketball arena and a brand-new baseball park within two hours of cities with professional franchises,” Stricklin said.

Under normal circumstances, the high school football preseason would arrive in August. The Florida High School Athletic Association has not announced plans for the fall sports, but the national federation has outlined a three-phase system starting with temperature checks and gatherings of no more than 10, gradually escalating to larger outdoor gatherings and eventually reaching the point where temperature screenings wouldn’t even be required.

For colleges and the pros, Lapchick envisions extreme caution with the athletes who draw eyeballs to our nation’s pastimes.

“I think the management of teams is going to be especially protective of the health of their players,” Lapchick wrote. “Great players are the primary asset of teams. The same will be true of college athletic directors and coaches and their student-athletes. The safety of the players has to be the primary concern before any games resume.”

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Gov. Ron DeSantis holds a University of Florida football jersey at a news conference honoring UF’s rise to No. 7 in the 2020 U.S. News & World Report list of Top Public Schools. [BERNARD BRZEZINSKI, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA VIA AP]



University of Miami President Dr. Julio Frenk predicts the Hurricanes will play football this fall, but without fans in attendance. [AP PHOTO/J PAT CARTER]



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Tourism will change its approach

Big crowds, for now, are out; what's in are staycations, wide-open spaces

By Alexandra Clough
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

The breezes beckon as they always have at Crane's Beach House, a luxury oasis tucked away in South Florida.

The boutique hotel in downtown Delray Beach features upscale amenities, including a personal concierge and an intimate tiki bar nestled in the garden.

In the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, however, luxe touches aren't the main attraction anymore.

Instead, cleanliness and minimal guest contact are the new standards of excellence.

Rooms now stay vacant a day before and a day after guests arrive at the 28-apartment-style suites, which regularly undergo deep cleaning.

Every guest receives a "safety" kit featuring face masks, single-use gloves and antiseptic wipes. Check-in is remote. Housekeeping is limited.

And the tiki bar is closed, for now.

"Our no-contact procedures are the total opposite of what the hospitality or travel industry is normally doing," said Cathy Balestriere, Crane's general manager. "We base our business on providing very personalized service, and now we have to go to a different experience."

For tourism to rebound, a move away from close social contact is the only way forward, Balestriere and other tourism leaders say.

Experts said enticing tourists to travel and spend money means making them feel confident they are not engaging in risky behavior. The only way to create confidence is to underscore that hotels and other tourist spots are doing everything they can to keep people safe.

"They've got to see people cleaning, whether it's a pool chair wiped down after each use or the doors to a restroom," said Derrick Steinour, director



Crane's Beach House Boutique Hotel & Luxury Villas sits near the ocean in Delray Beach. [PHOTO PROVIDED]

Tourism coming back

But it's not the mass scale, pack-them-in leisure market that made Florida a global attraction. Instead, you can expect:

- Staycation deals and offers
- Cleanliness and minimal guest contact are the new standards of excellence.
- Beaches and wide-open spaces are expected to draw tourists now and in the coming months as people tiptoe back to daily life.
- Small- to mid-sized Florida cities and towns and outdoor recreation are expected to be popular with tourists.

of sales and marketing at Hilton West Palm Beach.

"Visuals create that comfort," Steinour said. "And you've got one shot because first impressions matter."

Cleanliness is such an

important factor in tourism that some communities are seeking to obtain a type of Good Housekeeping seal of approval from the International Sanitary Supply Association, which has a program outlining strict standards of cleanliness for businesses.

Tourism, Florida's No. 1 industry, has been hard hit by the pandemic.

After years spent marketing the state, Florida's tourism industry attracted 127 million visitors in 2018, creating more than 1.5 million jobs that year, according to Visit Florida, the state's tourism marketing arm.

And 2020 was on track to be a record year for tourism, until the pandemic hit.

Nationwide, the pandemic will create \$1.2 trillion in economic losses this year. About \$520 billion are in direct travel spending, meaning travel and tourism has taken the brunt of

the virus.

Florida is the sixth-hardest hit state by COVID-19's impact on tourism, according to a study by WalletHub. And the tourism and retail industries have the most jobs at risk when it comes to dealing with the public, according to the Florida Chamber of Commerce.

The AHLA estimates that Florida has lost 336,467 of 747,705 hotel and hotel-supported jobs.

With Individual hotels and major operators projecting occupancy rates below 20%, some hotels may simply close their doors, putting 33,000 small businesses at immediate risk, the AHLA said.

Experts believe tourism will rebound to some degree, but in a much different way.

"We will re-emerge as a completely different industry than we were," said Peter Ricci, director of the Hospitality and Tourism Management program

at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton.

Tourism officials said they are targeting nearby residents as their first customers. Transportation logistics guide this decision.

Airlines have cut flights so dramatically, most tourists likely will need to be local, regional or otherwise reachable by car.

Therefore expect a lot of marketing for "staycations" that seek to lure people from homes to stay at hotels or visit area attractions.

Beaches and wide-open spaces are expected to draw tourists now and in the coming months as people tiptoe back to daily life. Florida cities with small to mid-sized towns and plenty of outdoor recreation are expected to be popular with tourists eager to get out and about, tourism leaders say.

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What the future may hold for theme parks

Disney sites yet to offer specifics about reopening

Curtis Tate
USA TODAY

The Universal Orlando and Legoland resorts are preparing to reopen in Florida after closing for more than two months in the wake of the global coronavirus pandemic.

But the question remains: When will Disney and other major theme parks follow suit?

Universal and Legoland have asked state and local officials in Florida to reopen June 1.

That leaves a number of other theme parks in Florida and across the country that will need to prepare – and potentially follow their lead on reopening plans full of restrictions and safety precautions.

Disney World and SeaWorld, both also closed since mid-March, have not set target reopening dates or unveiled their plans.

Smaller theme parks elsewhere in the country could open sooner. And California theme parks, including Disneyland, may be among the last to come back, with that state's stricter criteria for mass gatherings.

Last month, California Gov. Gavin Newsom outlined a phased reopening plan that appears to put theme parks in a higher-risk category of business that would open later.

Though Disney has offered no specifics about its reopening plans, its chief medical officer, Pamela Hymel, said this month that the company is looking at reopening in phases.

Hymel said physical distancing and capacity limits will be considered, in addition to cleanliness and sanitation, screening and prevention, and employee training.

Just about any theme park visit will prove to be a different experience for those who visit.



Orlando's Disney World, Disneyland Paris, Disney Cruise lines and Universal Studios are shut down temporarily due to the coronavirus pandemic. GETTY IMAGES

They'll probably get a temperature check.

They'll be encouraged, if not required, to wear a face mask.

They'll see fewer people in the park and have to social distance from them. Some attractions may remain closed, and parking, dining, hotels and retail will all change in some way.

The reopening of attractions such as theme parks will prompt the resumption of nonessential travel, which has plummeted since much of the U.S. economy went into sleep mode in March.

Southwest Airlines CEO Gary Kelly told CNBC last month that theme parks would play a role in getting travelers back on commercial flights.

Travelers "need to have something to be able to do when they get there," Kelly said.

"So Disney World needs to open back up. Restaurants need to open back up."

A reopened Universal will look very different for visitors and employees, ac-

cording to a presentation made to the local economic recovery task force by company officials.

Upon arrival, valet parking will not be available, and cars will park one or two spaces apart.

Visitors will receive a temperature check, and no one with a temperature above 100.4 degrees will be allowed to enter.

Employees will also receive temperature checks.

Visitors and employees will be required to wear face coverings. Universal will provide disposable face masks for visitors who don't bring their own.

The park's capacity will be limited, said John Sprouls, chief administrative officer for Universal Studios, though he did not specify by how much.

"We're going to ramp up very slowly," he told the economic recovery task force.

Sprouls said the interactive play areas at the park would remain closed, and the park would eliminate water and mist elements.

On rides, parties will be kept together, with no commingling, and attraction queues will be spaced out for social distancing.

Single-use paper menus will replace reusable ones in the park's restaurants. Mobile food ordering will be set up for all venues, Sprouls said.

The park will offer contactless payment options, including Google Pay and Apple Pay, but will also accept cash.

Employees will be required to take regular handwashing breaks, wear face masks and space themselves at least 6 feet apart.

They will also be asked to monitor their temperatures at home.

Universal has installed signage at the entrances and throughout the park to let visitors know what's expected of them. Visitors will also receive a handout, which will be available in English and other languages.

Universal's plan could be a model for other theme parks.

Neither Disney World nor SeaWorld have said when they will present their reopening plans to state and local officials.

The Disney Springs retail and dining complex in central Florida partially reopened with many of the elements of the Universal plan.

Visitors to Walt Disney World could see similar changes when the park reopens:

- Limited parking and reduced entrances
- Temperature screenings before entry, with a threshold of 100.4 degrees
- Face coverings required, except for children 3 and younger
- Physical distancing markers in queues and physical barriers
- Reduced hours and no scheduled entertainment
- Handwashing stations and hand sanitizer dispensers

Contributing: Kevin Bouffard, Lakeland Ledger; Sarah Griesemer and Alex Biese, Asbury Park Press

A Letter to Our Community & Friends



The Breakers extends our heartfelt gratitude to our community’s first responders, healthcare professionals and essential workers for their courage and heroism. We also want to recognize and praise the leadership and guidance from the Town of Palm Beach and Palm Beach County during these unprecedented times.

We proudly reopened on May 22 and warmly welcomed back our employees, club members, guests and local visitors. We are humbled by the outpouring of support for our businesses and appreciation of our efforts to enhance health and safety precautions for everyone’s well-being.

We invite you to view our initiatives, services and amenities by visiting our website: thebreakers.com/updates.

When you are ready, The Breakers will be here, like we have been for more than a century, stronger than ever.

Wishing collective health and well-being to our community.

With gratitude,

Paul N. Leone
Chief Executive Officer

Tricia Taylor
Executive Vice President &
General Manager



Next act for arts groups uncertain

Museums, theaters, performing troupes weigh new restrictions; look to August for more guidance

By Jan Sjostrom
Palm Beach Daily News

Palm Beach County’s museums, theaters, performing arts groups and other cultural providers aren’t likely to return to business as usual any time soon, as the state begins to emerge from the coronavirus shutdown.

There are too many unknowns. When will authorities lift restrictions imposed to prevent the spread of the virus? When will people feel comfortable gathering in large numbers? Which performers and shows will be willing and able to tour?

“There is really no certainty about anything,” said Judy Mitchell, the Kravis Center’s CEO.

Halls at the Kravis Center and Palm Beach Dramaworks in West Palm Beach remain dark under current restrictions and are likely to stay closed until social distancing is no longer advised.

“We don’t see a financial model that works to pay an artist \$125,000 and only be able to sell 400 seats,” Mitchell said. “The math doesn’t work.”

Also weighing on arts executives’ minds is whether fears of infection will keep patrons away. “Once we put out our brochure in August, we’ll see whether there’s an audience,” Mitchell said.

The Society of the Four Arts in Palm Beach, which relies more on memberships than ticket sales, will reopen its buildings when the governor lifts the ban on large gatherings, said Philip Rylands, president and CEO. The society’s King Library will reopen June 1 for curbside service by appointment, he said.

Current restrictions allow museums to reopen at 50 percent capacity.

The Norton Museum plans to reopen its sculpture garden at no charge June 1, Director and CEO Elliot Bostwick Davis said.

She hopes to open the museum’s first floor by mid-September. Reopening the upper floors will take longer, as the logistics of social distancing in elevators and stairways must be worked out.

Visitors returning to cultural venues are likely to encounter changes such as touchless ticketing, plentiful hand



The Norton Museum hopes to reopen its first floor by mid-September. It plans to maintain social distancing with timed ticketing and marked pathways throughout the galleries. [PHOTO BY NIGEL YOUNG]

Changes for the arts

- *Frequent deep cleanings
- * Touchless ticketing
- * Leaner seasons
- * More online offerings
- * Social-distancing and masks required, if the CDC still recommends them

sanitizers and regular deep cleanings. Safety measures at the Norton Museum will include pathway markers and timed entrances. If the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advises wearing masks, most groups will require them.

Seasons aren’t likely to unfold as was planned before the virus shuttered cultural venues in mid-March.

Leaders are juggling multiple scenarios, based on when and how they can resume operations.

Palm Beach Opera is exploring alternate venues in case the Kravis Center doesn’t reopen by the time the

company’s mainstage season begins in January, General Director David Walker said. It’s also considering leaner productions, such as concert versions, chamber operas and outdoor performances.

If social distancing lingers it could pose a problem for performers.

Recently, a panel of doctors and choral association leaders concluded that singers should be spaced 16 feet apart because tiny particles of the virus could spread as vocalists push air out from their lungs. Actors and instrumentalists likewise could find it difficult to socially distance.

Actors’ Equity Association is considering new rules that could require theaters to allocate more space for performers, said Bill Hayes, Palm Beach Dramaworks’ producing artistic director. Safety concerns, and the need to cut costs in a year when revenue is expected to shrink dramatically, has compelled the theater to rethink its season.

That means more works “with no or conceptual scenery and smaller casts,”

said Sue Ellen Beryl, Dramaworks’ managing director.

It’s unclear which of next season’s acts will cancel, the Kravis’ Mitchell said. “The industry buzz is that everybody will know a whole lot more come August,” she said.

The swell of digital programming ushered in by the shutdowns is likely to continue. For example, the Four Arts might introduce pay-for-view livestreams of onsite events that aren’t covered by memberships.

Whatever the season looks like, cultural leaders say they’ll need donors to stand by them to keep their organizations healthy.

Even if productions are fewer and less elaborate, “we need the support to sustain us through this one year so we can bounce back in 2021-22,” the opera’s Walker said.

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Changes will come once concerts restart

Distancing, sanitizing likely for shows in future

Gary Dinges
USA TODAY

When concerts eventually resume, fallout from the coronavirus pandemic could make for a dramatically different experience.

Seats might be blocked off to allow for social distancing, temperature checks are a possibility, hand sanitizer stations will likely be plentiful and masks could even be required in some venues to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19, music veterans say.

While a number of performances that had been set for March and April were pushed to the summer, there’s a serious doubt among some insiders that live music will fully return before 2021. A shortage of tests and the lack of a vaccine simply make things too risky, says Travis Rieder, research scholar at the Johns Hopkins Berman Institute of Bioethics.

“Attending a Beyoncé concert? I can’t imagine that happening until we have a vaccine,” Rieder said. “The risk of those events as we would have done them in the past outweighs the benefit of doing them. We are flexible creatures. We’re going to have to do things differently. We can find ways to do the things we love.”

Venues used by big-name touring acts such as Bon Jovi, Foo Fighters and the Jonas Brothers often seat more than 20,000 people. That makes contact tracing, should an attendee report having coronavirus, virtually impossible, Rieder says.

While elected officials have said science should be the primary decider on when life returns to normal, Rieder says it’s not really that easy.

“This is really hard,” he says. “We’re hearing a lot today that this is a science question. We think that’s only partially true. It’s an admirable answer, but it’s



German DJ Frans Zimmer performs a drive-in concert May 21. GETTY IMAGES

really about trading off values.

“We want decision-makers to really think through what are the benefits and burdens under each set of policies.”

Getting performers back on stage

Right now, music industry professionals from across the nation – bookers, promoters, security personnel, venue executives – are huddling, trying to come up with best practices to get performers back on stage.

Whenever that happens, music lovers should be ready for big changes, says Karly Tuckness, co-founder of Four Leaf Productions, a firm started this year by veterans of C3 Presents, the company behind Lollapalooza and the Austin City Limits Music Festival.

Among the precautions she predicts “in the short term” are hand-washing and sanitizer stations, requiring attendees to wear masks and temperature checks at gates.

“Some of these things may become

the new normal, some may phase out over time,” Tuckness says.

The solution will differ depending on the type of event, according to Scott Davidson, president of Code 4 Event Management and Emergency Services.

At some events, guests may be asked to register to help with contact tracing efforts. Davidson plans for additional safety training for venue staff and educational signage for patrons.

When it comes to creating 6 feet of space between attendees, things get a little more difficult, Tuckness says.

“While our industry is nimble and responsive, physical distancing may be hard to achieve at a large music event,” she says.

Venues could keep open seats or rows to create space between people. Or reduce capacity “to help spread people out while still achieving the collective experience attendees crave,” she says.

The safety and sanitation lessons learned as a result of the coronavirus will come in handy when it comes to

preparing for what the future may hold, Davidson says.

“Just as we did after (the) terrorist attacks of 9/11, we must continue to apply these lessons learned to enhance our preparedness for the next threat to our industry and community,” he says.

Kevin Lyman, who founded the Vans Warped Tour in 1995, says the current pandemic could lead a number of performers and festivals to go online. One of his events, the 320 Festival had been set to take place in Los Angeles but will be livestreamed instead.

“We were on such a treadmill of touring, and I think some of the online ideas were always an afterthought and not given much attention,” he says. “However, this was such a shock to the whole ecosystem of the business. It is now opening many opportunities to explore this medium.”

Most people will still crave the live experience, Lyman says, but he predicts watching online could be the new norm for as many as 10% of concertgoers.

Small venues face similar issues

While making larger venues safe has been a focus for many, owners of smaller live music venues across the country are struggling, too.

In Milwaukee, Linneman’s Riverwest Inn remains closed and owner Jim Linneman isn’t sure when it will reopen. He knows big changes are ahead.

“Bars and live music venues like mine require people to survive,” he says. “Unfortunately, people are the host, or carriers, of this awful virus. So nightclubs must adapt until the vaccine or cure is found.”

Linneman says temperature checks are likely at the door, as well as hand sanitizer stations. At the bar, he plans to install plexiglass to protect bartenders. Some bar stools will be removed to create distance. Waitstaff will wear gloves and masks, and drinkware will likely be disposable plastic instead of glass.



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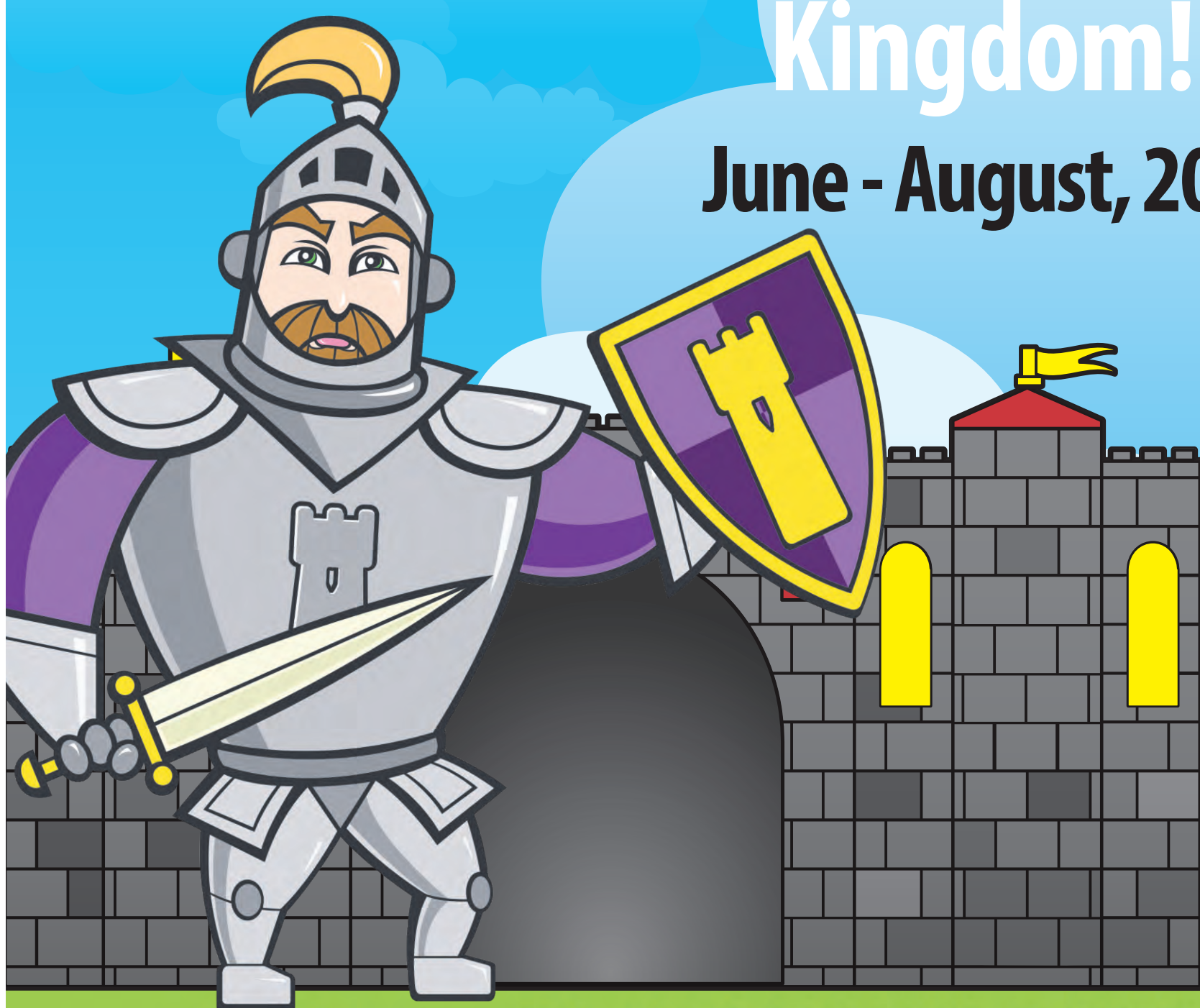
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How transportation will start moving again in South Florida

‘It will happen,’ PBIA director says of anticipated return to normal

By Eliot Kleinberg
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

In the march toward normality during the coronavirus pandemic, transportation will face a bumpy path. Palm Beach International Airport never shut down. But lately it’s looked like every other airport in the world: mostly empty. With airlines forced by near-empty planes to consolidate flights, departures, traditionally about 100 a day, have averaged in the teens, and daily passenger volume, said Laura Beebe Palm Beach County’s director airports, which operates PBIA. Daily passenger volume, which usually is more than 1,000, dropped 47 percent in March and was projected to be down more than 90 percent for April and May, Beebe told The Palm Beach Post on May 12.

PBIA does plan a major campaign for as close as it can get to a return to normal, Beebe said.

“It will happen,” she said. But, she said, it mostly will consist of educating people about steps the airport already has been taking during the crisis.

“It doesn’t sound new, but we’ve expanded on what we’ve already started with,” Beebe said. “And honestly, we started very early in this process.”

And, she said, “We are not one of the large hubs, mega-airports. Because we’re smaller, we’re a little more nimble.”

Beebe said the airport has beefed up its cleaning protocols, adding electrostatic sprayers and, as supplies allow amid the worldwide demand, hand sanitizers. And it will be ordering more. And it’s installed acrylic “transmission barriers” at airline ticket counters and gate podiums.

It will be marking floors for social distancing and adding signs and public-address announcements.

“We’re trying to figure out how you build customer confidence,” Beebe said.

Tri-Rail also never stopped running, even though ridership dropped about 80 percent, Executive Director Steven Abrams said May 12. He said the agency cut back to 18 runs per day from 50.

The regional commuter rail service



The Brightline BrightOrange train approaches the downtown West Palm Beach station during testing on December 8. [RICHARD GRAULICH / PALMBEACHPOST.COM]

doubled its sanitation of cars and platforms and will continue to clean at that level for now, Abrams said.

“Our overall goal is to match demand as people gradually go back to work and school,” Abrams said.

As with the other transportation sectors, Abrams acknowledged that Tri-Rail’s toughest task is restoring passengers’ confidence. He said the agency already is working with its marketing teams and has a television spot ready to go to show all that Tri-Rail is doing to keep ridership safe.

Palm Tran, Palm Beach County’s bus service, has been operating all but five routes on a Saturday or Sunday schedule, and has not set a date to restore full service, the agency said.

It began requiring all passengers wear masks May 11. It has limited ridership to 15 people and required that passengers come and go from the rear to protect the

driver. It has been cleaning and disinfecting buses nightly as well as when they are in service.

Brightline, the high-speed rail line connecting West Palm Beach with Fort Lauderdale and Miami, suspended service March 25. The agency said May 20 that it does “not anticipate resuming operations in the coming months,” citing “social distancing guidelines, mandated work-from-home policies and other considerations.”

Amtrak has been continuing service during the pandemic. Starting May 11, it required all masks for all customers in stations or on trains or buses. The national rail line already had operating its trains at half-capacity, taking only cashless payment and promoting social distancing. It also was limiting food service as well as seating in dining areas.

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What to expect

- **PBIA:** Ticket counters will have acrylic barriers. Floors will have social-distancing reminders. Electrostatic sprayers will help keep terminals clean.
- **Tri-Rail:** The commuter rail line will increase the number of trains each day as demand rises. It also has doubled how often it cleans its trains.
- **Palm Tran:** People riding Palm Beach County’s buses must wear masks until further notice and exit through a vehicle’s rear doors.
- **Amtrak:** The national rail line will keep its trains at half-capacity, take only cashless payments and limit food service on trains.

Car buyers are now in the driver’s seat

Dealerships delivering vehicles to customers

Jamie L. LaReau
Detroit Free Press
USA TODAY NETWORK

At some point, we’ve all felt like a chump in a car dealership showroom, waiting for the salesperson to emerge from a shrouded back office where they presumably spent the last 20 minutes pushing a hard-nosed manager to chip another hundred bucks off the price of that car you’re haggling over.

After hours at the dealership, it feels like an endless game that you’re destined to lose.

But that exhausting and enigmatic car-buying process at bricks-and-mortar stores will be a relic of the past in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic, industry experts predict. Mandated stay-home orders have forced car buyers and dealers to adopt a new “bricks-and-clicks” model instead.

“I can order my groceries to my door, I can order new running shoes to my door ... every part of our life right now is delivered,” said Jessica Stafford, general manager of Autotrader and Kelley Blue Book. “Our studies have shown that in the COVID-19 world, I want to be able to have a virtual walk around the car and be able to talk to the dealer. You bring it to my house, it’s clean and I can test it. If I do buy it, you bring it back to my house for final delivery.”

Many dealers already do some sales online, but few had offered home delivery prior to the pandemic. The emerging car buying model puts the buyer in the driver’s seat with transparent pricing and more options. Those dealers who can’t adapt to it will die, industry observers said.

In control of the transaction

Jonathan Winingham, 34, of Cartersville, Virginia, likes being in control



A customer looks at trucks at Longo Toyota on May 8 in El Monte, Calif. More people are buying cars without having to leave their homes these days. AP

when he’s buying a car.

Winingham knew he wanted a 2020 Honda Pilot SUV to replace his 9-year-old Toyota Sienna minivan.

So in early May, Winingham, a firefighter and paramedic who works 72 hours a week, shopped online and found a Pilot in silvery blue. He closed the deal largely online and was prepared to drive nearly two hours to Carter Myers Automotive’s Valley Honda in Staunton, Virginia, to get his new car. But he didn’t have to.

“They offered to deliver it and they showed up with gloves and masks on to my home and everything was sanitized,” Winingham said. “They let me test drive it at my house and it was perfect. We signed the paperwork and that was it.”

For Winingham, price is the determining factor in a purchase. He has used online shopping in the past to find the best deal, once saving \$4,000 on a past purchase, then driving to a Kentucky dealership to take delivery.

But this experience, with home deliv-

ery, has convinced Winingham there’s no other way to buy a car in the future.

“I can sit in my home,” Winingham said. “I don’t have to go to a dealership and go through that eight-hour process and then wait to sign the paperwork.”

Traditional salesmen gone

Carter Myers Automotive in Charlottesville, Virginia, which has 15 stores throughout the state, has seen its online vehicle purchasing steadily grow since mid-March.

Its home deliveries have shot up from less than 5% of new-vehicle sales to nearly a quarter of all sales, said Liza Borches, CEO of Carter Myers Automotive.

Borches said she expects online buying and home delivery to proliferate.

The biggest change Borches expects after coronavirus for her is in hiring. Gone are the traditional car salesmen. They are being replaced by product experts who are well versed at communicating across all mediums.

“The sales associate sitting in the showroom waiting for the customer to come in won’t exist past COVID,” Borches said. “They need to create relationships in person and online.”

Ease and speed of the sale

On the other side of the country, online sales fit the Del Grande Dealer Group in San Jose, California. The group already offers no-haggle used-car pricing. It has competitively priced new vehicles to require little negotiation, said Jeremy Beaver, president of Del Grande.

But before the pandemic, the group did zero home deliveries. That changed in April when it delivered all the cars it sold “because we had to,” Beaver said referring to the lockdown.

He sees home delivery as the new normal now. It offers dealers a chance to win new customers by providing stellar service.

“Right now, it’s due to safety, because people don’t want to leave their house,” Beaver said. “In the future, it’ll be the ease of the transaction and the speed. There is no waiting. If you do have to come to the dealership, you just have to check a couple of boxes and you’re done.”

Driving ‘ahead of the herd’

Dimmitt Chevrolet Inc. in Clearwater, Florida, has done a “handful” of home deliveries since March, but online transactions have “increased dramatically,” owner Larry Dimmitt said. The buyers still come to the store to get the vehicle, where he has outdoor desks set up.

A third-generation dealer who has run his store since 1972, Dimmitt knows how to survive. He said online sales and home delivery are the future.

“The harder and quicker we adapt to that, the further out ahead of the herd we will be,” Dimmitt said. “It’ll deal a bit of blow to some of the weaker, more remote stores.”

Malls begin to welcome shoppers



A shopper makes her way into The Gardens Mall, which re-opened May 15. [DAMON HIGGINS/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]



A Gardens mall worker sanitizes tables. [DAMON HIGGINS/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]



Jayla Knowles, 9, of West Palm Beach, with her family in the Mall at Wellington Green. The mall partially opened May 18. [ALLEN EYESTONE/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]



The Wellington mall's play area remained closed. [ALLEN EYESTONE/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]



A shopper at The Gardens Mall in Palm Beach Gardens. [DAMON HIGGINS/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]



Shoppers return to the Mall at Wellington Green. [ALLEN EYESTONE/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]



Mall walker Peter Tauber of Wellington resumed his rounds at the Mall at Wellington Green. [ALLEN EYESTONE/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]

Stores, malls reopening with masks, rules

Appointments, dividers in future for retailers

Dalvin Brown and Kelly Tyko
USA TODAY

Malls and stores that have been off-limits for shoppers with all of the stay-at-home orders are opening the door to a brand-new shopping experience vastly different from what we all knew when most closed in mid-March.

Welcome to a new phase of COVID-19 pandemic shopping where there are fewer places to lounge for a break or a bite, trying on clothes gets complicated and planning a strategy is required before going where families spent their Saturdays, teens experienced first dates and friends roamed for hours on end.

The overall experience will not be as seamless as it used to be.

In most cases, you can't simply walk in without store or mall employees giving a thumbs-up as they adhere to new capacity limitations. You may need to wait in line to enter and could be turned away from some stores if you're not wearing a mask.

For those who venture out first, there's a payoff: Discounts.

Retailers are sitting on mounds of inventory to get rid of after being closed for months.

"In apparel, the price for consumers will actually fall," said Neil Saunders, managing director of the retail consultancy GlobalData. "They will have a lot more discounts and a lot more bargains."

As malls across the nation get back to business, here's how the retail landscape has changed and how people will shop.

Shopping by appointment

One of the shopping innovations seeing a rise in the wake of COVID-19 is virtual appointments. The online setups allow you to carve out a time to shop in



Team members at the Jared, Galleria of Jewelry, in Frisco, Texas, maintain a 6-foot social distance while preparing the store. MATT BROWN/SIGNET JEWELERS

advance or connect with brands remotely.

David's Bridal launched a virtual stylist and online appointment experience to help with wedding plans. On May 6, Suitsupply introduced guided virtual shopping. And in April, the makeup company Glossier launched a video chat function that supports one-on-one consultations.

"Some customers may be anxious about a brick-and-mortar experience," said Bill Luth, executive vice president of store operations at Signet Jewelers, whose 3,000 stores including Kay Jewelers, Zales and Jared have begun rolling out video appointments. "We spent time elevating our digital journey so when our customers start shopping our brands, they can do it in a modern and compelling way."

But there are in-person appointments and waitlists, too. Some stores at Taubman Center malls are letting shoppers join virtual waitlists via an app and maybe wait in the car or away from the crowd. Shoppers then get a push noti-

fication when it's time to come in.

"They're scrambling to find ways to reopen and to do a better job managing the number of shoppers in the stores," said OpenTable CEO Steve Hafner.

In late March, the company announced an expansion of its software to let users choose between available shopping time slots at supermarkets and retailers, the way you would make a restaurant reservation on the app.

The Container Store and Best Buy are welcoming shoppers back to reopening stores by appointment only.

"We've started by scheduling one customer in the store at a time and gradually depending upon local and state government, we've opened that up," Container Store CEO Melissa Reiff told USA TODAY.

In addition to offering shopping by appointment and virtual waitlists via app among other new features, Westfield Shopping Centers will give customers a look at real-time shopper activity so you can plan a shopping trip based on the current crowds.

How will retail workers serve you?

Once you make it inside the store, you'll notice what retailers are focusing on: "The new brand commitment is going to be health and safety," said Matt Shay, president and CEO of the National Retail Federation.

Those reminder signs, plexiglass dividers and social distancing markers taped on the floor at stores like Walmart, Target and Whole Foods will also be in mall stores.

Apple, Macy's, Kohl's, Old Navy, Ulta Beauty and Nordstrom are among the many retailers who have announced their employees will be required to wear face coverings. Some retail employees will also be required to wear gloves.

Shoppers will also be asked to wear masks in some cases. Apple, like Costco, mandates it if you want to enter the store.

What about trying clothes on?

Clothing stores are the top choice among consumers looking to spend, according to a recent study by the retail analytics firm First Insight. But people aren't as eager to try on clothes – which is fine because retailers are limiting the practice anyway.

Sixty-five percent of women and 54% of men said they will not feel safe trying on clothes in dressing rooms during the pandemic, the survey found.

Companies including Target, Kohl's, T.J. Maxx and Ross have closed fitting rooms altogether.

"We just feel like it's an extra step so people are assured that we're taking all the precautions," Kohl's CEO Michelle Gass said in an interview with USA TODAY, adding that employees remind shoppers of Kohl's "very generous" 180-day return policy.

Meanwhile, household names like Macy's, Nordstrom and Saks Fifth Avenue are keeping fitting rooms open, but there will be fewer available as workers have to clean them between use.

In Palm Beach County, expect retail changes to last

Shoppers are greeted with plexiglass shields and a high-profile focus on cleanliness

By Alexandra Clough
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Bette Steisel strolled along Atlantic Avenue in Delray Beach one morning, peering into windows but not venturing inside any stores.

Finally, she entered a shop. It was Urban Outfitters, a clothing and home decor chain.

An employee was folding clothes on a table. Behind her was a new plexiglass barrier fronting the cash registers.

Steisel moved to a clothing rack. As she began browsing, she noted it was the first time she had walked into a retail clothing store since the coronavirus pandemic began.

"It feels good," she said with a little smile. Then she looked around. "But we're the only people here."

Experts say Steisel won't be alone in noticing the changed shopping environment.

Things are going to feel different for Palm Beach County's retail industry for some time to come. Thin crowds and an emphasis on cleanliness are going to be the gold standard for stores, shops and businesses that cater to the public.

Now that state and local leaders have allowed non-essential businesses to reopen, people leaving their homes for an outing will encounter changes likely to remain for the long haul, said Orin Rosenfeld, of Rosenfeld Realty Advisors, a real



The Gardens Mall, which reopened Friday morning for the first time in nearly two months, will require all of its employees to play a role in keeping the mall clean, May 15, 2020. [DAMON HIGGINS/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]

estate brokerage in Boca Raton.

Among the new standards at stores and other retail businesses: Social distancing markers on the floors, masked employees and visible cleaning efforts everywhere.

Although some consumers already have returned to their old shopping habits, not every store will be flooded with customers, experts said.

Rosenfeld said many consumers, particularly those over age 30, remain wary of catching the coronavirus. In fact, he predicted some people will remain content to stay at home in the coming months.

It all comes down to an individual's appetite for risk. "What do you really need in life and what kind of risk are you willing to take?" Rosenfeld said.

Those venturing out may tend to favor open-air centers. In Palm Beach

County, those locations include the Palm Beach Outlets and Rosemary Square in West Palm Beach as well as Mizner Park in Boca Raton.

Open-air centers are not without their own new rules, however.

At Rosemary Square, common areas are cleaned hourly. Entrance and exit paths are marked, and guest services, security and cleaning staff are required to wear masks and gloves.

At the Outlets, store doors were open, employees wore masks and everyone "was very polite and efficient," said shopper Ray Wess, who recently traveled to the outlets from his Wellington home to buy shoes.

And shoppers had no issues following social distancing rules, said Sarah Kudisch, Palm Beach Outlets manager. "Everybody seems to be courteous and

respectful," she said.

Indoor malls also are open, and many have welcomed back shoppers. But the county's two largest malls have a lengthy list of cleaning and crowd control protocols in place.

Simon Property Group, owner of the Town Center mall in Boca Raton, said its safety protocols include employee screening for illness, and providing them protective equipment.

At The Gardens Mall, The Forbes Co. is limiting the number of customers in the mall and requiring mall employees to wear masks and gloves, too.

Security guards open doors for guests, and workers can be seen cleaning common areas. Constantly.

The visual reminders are reassuring to customers who have kept the mall busier than expected, said leasing manager Al Ferris. "It feels great to be open, and overall I'm

Going shopping? Expect new rules as stores reopen

- At malls, common areas are cleaned hourly, not just daily. Hand sanitizing stations are installed in high-traffic areas.
- Safety protocols include employee screening for illness, and providing them protective equipment.
- Many retailers will maintain permanent pickup areas outside their stores for customers who ordered items online.
- Retailers are back in business, yes, but they have to make up for weeks of lost business while shouldering the costs of cleaning supplies and employee safety equipment.

very pleased."

Ferris said people who venture to The Gardens Mall are doing so with a purpose. "There's no browsing here. They're shopping," he said.

The cleaning and safety moves will help create confidence in the safety of enclosed centers, retail experts said. But the feeling may be dependent on how retailers run their stores.

Costco, for instance, requires that all its members wear face masks. Luxury retailer Louie Vuitton requires masks of all customers too, Ferris said.

But shopping malls in general, and many stores in particular, encourage but do not require masks. Wherever stores are

located, whether it's in a strip shopping mall or an indoor center, Rosenfeld said retailers will face challenges.

Not only do they have to contend with financial pressures, including weeks of lost business, they also will have to shoulder the added expenses of cleaning supplies and employee safety equipment.

In addition, they will be dealing with consumers whose shopping habits may be changed.

Rosenfeld expects many retailers will create permanent pickup areas outside their stores for customers who ordered items online.

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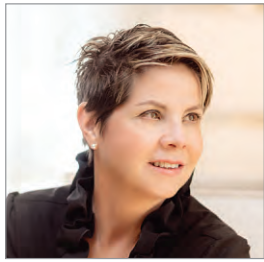
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