

Our New Normal:

It's fair to say none of us thought we would be in this situation: experiencing a worldwide pandemic. We're a small coastal Georgia city where life is good, usually untouched by occurrences continents away. COVID-19 changed all that. While we have expertise locally dealing with natural disasters, addressing pandemics has proven quite different. The scenario is in constant flux so we take one day at a time absorbing the flow of information from physicians, scientists and economists. Issuing the encompassing emergency order for the city of St. Marys last week came only after considerable evaluation. The Order is available on the city website. New measures may be added so please stay informed. Continue reading this newspaper and checking the city website and City Facebook. Each of us can be better prepared if we are well informed.

What I want to address today is how the pandemic is affecting the citizens and businesses of St. Marys. You have had to accept new terminology like "social distancing", "shelter-in-place", and "flattening the curve". If you're a senior citizen or someone with a compromised immune system, you are strongly urged to stay at home. If you are working in health care, law enforcement, a grocery or pharmacy, in sanitation or warehousing, as a truck driver or delivery person, you are urged to go to work unless sick. If you are parents of school age children, you may be challenged to care for them and still work. You may be out of work because of business closures. We all have friends and neighbors in each of these categories. We want to reach out and support them but "social distancing" makes that difficult. It means more reliance on electronic options like telephone, text, or email to let them know we care.

To say these are difficult times is an understatement. No expert has been able to predict how long this will last or when we might see some relief. For those in critical jobs, the long hours and stress can take a toll. For those confined at homes, cabin fever isolation is setting in. For parents with young restless children, creativity remains a challenge. For those who cannot visit family in nursing homes, it is emotionally draining. It is important we all recognize and respect each of these individual situations and sacrifices of our neighbors.

Our human nature is to socialize. Socialization is key to a healthy lifestyle. Now we can only do so at a distance, a new and uncomfortable reality requiring both mental and physical adjustments. We should still reach out but must take personal precautions, practice social distancing and find new ways to help. We have always taken pride in being a small caring community that believes in neighbor helping neighbor. I am confident that will not change. It is at the heart of this special city. My personal thanks to those on the front line and those in the background who continue to provide the vital services we tend to take for granted. I also appreciate those citizens who quietly reach out every day to help others. You all make this city better.

My personal goal is to return to some sense of normalcy and I know most of you share that goal. If we stay focused with all doing their part to protect themselves and others, that day will come. Yes, there are challenges but together we can achieve this goal. We must.