

## States of Emergency...from Page 1A

have had their ability to work and pay bills impacted by recommended social distancing practices, which have prompted many consumers to stay home and not spend money.

This chilling effect on commerce has been exacerbated by local governments everywhere feeling the pressure to codify restrictions on public gatherings and commercial activities, further burdening the workforce in order to slow the spread of the virus.

As a result, employers are having to lay off workers left and right, and local governments around the state are relying on a potentially confusing patchwork of ordinance-imposed restrictions that vary from one place to another.

The bottom line? Widespread social distancing recommendations combined with variable, community-specific restrictions seem to be having an effect similar to a statewide shelter-in-place, only without the benefit of a single, simplified order compelling people to stay put.

Union County's governmental leaders implemented their own local measures last week, as the Union County Government and the city of Blairsville issued separate state of emergency declarations.

Both declarations took the form of emergency ordinances, which, among other things, prohibited most public gatherings of more than 10 people and shut down businesses requiring close physical contact, like barber shops, hair salons and nail places.

Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris signed his resolution on the courthouse steps on March 26, declaring a state of emergency to run March 30 through the end of April.

Citing recent emergency declarations at the federal and state levels, as well as the importance of deterring the virus, Paris said the local declaration would allow the county to do its part in providing for the health and safety of the people and property of Union County.

He put in place a March 30 start time for the state of emergency to give local businesses the chance to hear about the declaration and make the appropriate arrangements to comply.

Of course, social distancing plays a major role in the ordinance, with people exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms being advised to seek medical attention while refraining from frequenting public buildings, restaurants, shops, "and all other areas where the public ingresses or egresses."

The ordinance allows residents to use county sidewalks or designated pedestrian areas like in Meeks Park "for walking or other exercise if they are not participating in an organized gathering" of more than 10 people.

As further outlined, restaurants are not to offer dine-in services, but they may continue drive-through, takeout and/or delivery services during the period of the declaration.

This is in line with the governor's March 23 executive order, which prompted the Health Department to inform restaurant owners last week that they were to close interior dining areas to the public and switch to offering curbside service and/or delivery.

For a list of altered local restaurant operations, visit [www.visitdowntownblairsville.com/eat](http://www.visitdowntownblairsville.com/eat), and for altered retail operations, check out [www.visitdowntownblairsville.com/shop](http://www.visitdowntownblairsville.com/shop).

visitdowntownblairsville.com/shop.

Exempt from the mandatory closure of businesses requiring physical contact are licensed medical doctors, nurses, dentists, physical therapists, chiropractors and/or other health care professionals.

All other establishments, such as grocery stores, pharmacies, and other businesses that remain open during the emergency, must post entrance-door signage telling consumers to maintain at least 6 feet between themselves.

No more than 10 people are allowed inside an establishment "at any one time if such social distancing cannot be maintained."

At this time, the county is not imposing a curfew, and residents are not being asked to shelter in place, though Paris has reserved the right to order either "if the public fails to otherwise comply with this declaration or if it becomes necessary to more fully address the declared emergency."

The Union County Sheriff's Office will be in charge of enforcing the ordinance during the emergency, and deputies will work to use discretion and issue warnings as appropriate, as "the whole objective is safety and compliance" in slowing the virus, the Sheriff's Office said.

Concerning prosecution of violators, Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley said that people would be guilty of a state misdemeanor if convicted.

"I'm confident that the Sheriff's Department and other law enforcement agencies will use appropriate discretion in trying to warn people," Langley said. "But if someone obstinately refuses to comply, it does provide for up to 60 days in jail and a \$1,000 fine, which we will enforce."

"People need to understand that violation of this declaration is a violation of law that will be prosecuted. I'm confident that 99 percent of the people in our community want to show consideration for their neighbors, and therefore, they're going to protect one another by abiding by this declaration."

The declaration also activated the Union County Emergency Operations Plan, which allows Emergency Management Agency Director

David Dyer the ability to coordinate the efforts of all local first responders should the need arise during the declared emergency period.

"We're talking to every agency already, but if this ever ramped up to the point to where we're into a response mode, we would have a representative from each department in our Emergency Operations Center," Dyer said. "For example, we would have a (Sheriff's Office) representative in our EOC that's over law enforcement. So, if we had law enforcement issues that came into the EOC, we would just send them to the law enforcement person, and they would take care of it."

"On the other side of the coin, if law enforcement needed something, instead of them having to look all over the world for it, they would send that up to our EOC, and then we would work through the Georgia Emergency Management Agency to get the resources for them to do their job."

"We're not telling them what to do, we're not telling them how to do it — we're just coordinating it to where everybody knows what everybody else is doing."

Again, Paris' emergency declaration will remain in effect through 11:59 p.m. on April 30, though it would "terminate in conjunction with the termination of the governor's State of Emergency," or at any time the commissioner deemed appropriate.

The Blairsville City Council passed the city's emergency declaration via teleconference on March 25, enumerating inside city limits many of the same provisions as the county's ordinance.

Additionally, utilities provided by the city will not be disconnected for nonpayment, and people will have 45 days to catch up on their payments following the declared emergency.

The city's emergency ordinance went into effect Thursday, March 26, and will run through 11:59 p.m. Tuesday, April 7, unless extended.

Both the city and county's emergency ordinances can be viewed in their entirety by visiting the "North Georgia News" Facebook page.

## Small Businesses...from Page 1A

have the restaurant industry also feeling a significant pinch.

Nani's, a family-owned Cuban restaurant located in Blairsville, has suffered a 75 percent drop in business after the city ordered all restaurants to close their interior dining areas. But that hasn't stopped owners Ray and Marife Arrazcaeta from lending a helping hand.

On Monday, March 30, starting at 11 a.m., Nani's hosted its first "Feed Union County 2020" weekly soup drive in the restaurant parking lot.

The event isn't just for needy families and the elderly, but first responders, police, nurses, doctors and everyone that plays a role in keeping the community healthy and safe.

"My mother was an administrator at a hospital, so I've always been very close with doctors and nurses," Marife said. "So, I started taking donations to provide a little bit of relief to those people."

"Since we are closed on Monday, we decided we would convert the parking lot to a drive-through. We'll set up tables, have the food in bags, and we hope to feed as many people as we can."

In addition to thanking the community for all of their donations, Marife Arrazcaeta gave a shout out to the culinary department at North Georgia Tech, which allowed Nani's to use everything from their kitchen.

Nani's isn't the only one putting others first during the pandemic; House of Prayer Church is also handing out soup on Wednesday mornings at 11:30 a.m.

First Methodist Church of Union County is hosting "Table of Grace" on the first and third Tuesday of the month. And beginning Monday, April 6, New Union Baptist Church will hand out groceries from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

The grocery store/supermarket industry has faced a different set of challenges during the pandemic. While they haven't been limited by any city or county regulations, Foodland has struggled to meet a nationwide increase in public demand.

According to Floor Manager James Baker, all supermarkets across the country are having a difficult

time restocking their shelves. Still, he understands the need for public safety and assures the community that Foodland will continue doing its best to balance the public's needs with their health and wellbeing.

"Our biggest challenge is our warehouse stock limitations," Baker said. "We've ordered products for our shoppers, but due to the high demand for these items all over the United States, we're unable to get the quantities we need."

"But we are thrilled to go the extra mile to keep our customers and employees safe. So, whatever guidelines we have to follow, we will happily abide by."

Meanwhile, O'Reilly Auto Parts District Manager Ricky Tanner is doing everything in his power to keep his customers and employees safe and his stores clean and sanitized. He's also aware of the economic impact and the worries that follow when business lags.

"We know times are hard, but we're trying to keep (our employees) working as much as we can," Tanner said, whose district stretches from Toccoa to Jasper and includes parts of North Carolina. "Right now, I have some stores where that's easy, and I have others where it's a struggle. Our northern stores are doing well because there hasn't been a lot of cases."

"But we have great team members, so I'm trying to move them around whenever I can to keep them working. As long as they're willing to drive, I can find them work."

However, Tanner believes things are going to get worse before they get better, and he cites his other stores as evidence of what could potentially happen in Union County.

"The last two weeks have affected us some, but I think after the next two it will really start to affect us," he said. "I don't think people are taking it seriously up here because we haven't had a case yet (as of March 27)."

"That's what happened with my Jasper store; nobody was taking it seriously until they had a case pop up. That store was going well, but now business has almost died out."

Tanner admits that he's not as worried about a national chain like O'Reilly's as much as he is the local family business, like his dad Wayne Tanner's towing service.

"I know we're a corporation, but what worries me most is the family businesses," he added. "I know it's just a matter of time before they start hurting."

"I always urge people to shop locally and help local businesses whenever they can. But right now, people should try to stay home as much as possible."