

Food supplies are fine; rush buying causes some shortages

Wednesday, March 18: Normally, the week of the Fourth of July is the best week for grocery stores in Minnesota. And, since they know it's coming, stores are able to stock up on inventory and plan extra staff.

The COVID-19 grocery rush came as a surprise. "We've had our biggest week ever, and we weren't expecting it," said general manager Andrea Teal of Teal's Market, which owns and operates 12 grocery stores in Minnesota and the Dakotas, including in Paynesville. "It's been a crazy six days," she added.

In Paynesville, and other stores, a rush hit on Thursday, March 12, which was their one-day meat sale, already a busy day. "What we saw is people were panic buying in the big stores first," said Teal. "Then it moved to the smaller stores and communities. Ever since then, it's been nuts."

Empty shelves were a sign of rushed buying, not necessarily a shortage in supply. "There are still groceries out there. Maybe just not the kind you're used to," said Teal.

According to the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, "The food supply is safe. Public health and food safety experts do not have any evidence to suggest that COVID-19 can be transmitted by food."

"There is no shortage of food in Minnesota," the Department of Agriculture continued. "The Minnesota Grocers Association confirms that supplies are abundant."

But, warns the ag department, "From farm to fork, Minnesota's food supply chain is complex. We are working actively to provide technical support and guidance to our regu-

lated industries including grocery stores, convenience stores, dairies, meat processors, and food manufacturers."

Teal's Market, along with their wholesaler SpartanNash, is working to get their warehouse and shelves stocked fully again. Teal's is trying to buy some highly-sought-for items – such as toilet paper and hand sanitizer – via additional vendors, said Teal. For hand sanitizer, they are trying to order some from a Canadian vendor, since their normal supply comes from China.

With bars, restaurants, and schools temporarily closed, forcing more people to eat more meals at home, grocers are expecting to be busy throughout the COVID-19 "social distancing."

"We're working on getting our shelves back full," said Teal.

Teal's Market had already started online ordering – in a trial phase in Cold Spring and Albany – and likely will expand that offering when it can, said Teal. They are encouraging stores to offer delivery and pick-up, and many stores already do this for seniors, though this is contingent on having enough staff.

Teal's Market is asking that high risk shoppers come the first hour of the day – 7 a.m. to 8 a.m. in Paynesville.

Dollar General stores are also doing this morning shopping time for high-risk shoppers – also 7 a.m. to 8 a.m. in Paynesville.

Teal thanked their employees for stepping up in the rush last week, as well as their customers. "All our customers have been great. I know there's lots of panic out there, but we've seen a lot of great things from our customers, too," she Teal.

"I hope we get back to normal pretty fast," said Teal.

~ *Michael Jacobson*

Community foundation starts Paynesville Area Response Fund

Friday, March 20: The Paynesville Area Community Foundation (PACF) announced today (Friday, March 20) the establishment of the Paynesville Area Response Fund. The purpose of the fund is to support the local community in times of crisis, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic.

To make a contribution to the fund, visit www.community-giving.org/donate/paynesville-area-response-fund.

Dick Johnson, board chair of the Paynesville Area Community Foundation stated, "Paynesville Area Response Fund is an opportunity to support our friends and neighbors who are facing the greatest needs during this crisis. We are all in this together."

The Paynesville Area Community Foundation will work with local agencies to identify the greatest needs of the community and disseminate the funds to local 501c(3) nonprofits, governmental, and faith-based organizations. There is also a statewide relief fund being operated by the Minnesota Council on Foundations and the St. Paul and Minnesota Community Foundation. For more information on this fund, visit <https://mcf.org/minnesota-disaster-recovery-fund-coronavirus>.

The Paynesville Area Community Foundation (PACF), a partner of the Central Minnesota Community Foundation and powered by CommunityGiving, is a public charity that attracts and administers charitable funds for the benefit of the local community. The Paynesville Area Community Foundation has grown to over \$4.2 million in assets and awarded over \$595,000 in grants to the community.

Collectively, CommunityGiving administers nearly 850 funds totaling more than \$150 million. Learn more at CommunityGiving.org/Paynesville.

CentraCare offering video visits for chronic conditions

Friday, March 20: To ensure that patients with chronic conditions get the care they need during the COVID-19 outbreak, CentraCare is now offering video visits. This action benefits patients with chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, or cancer.

Patients with current appointments will be contacted to change their in-person appointments to video visits. "Patients with chronic conditions may also be at a higher risk for COVID-19. With a video visit, we can help patients manage their condition in the safest way possible, by staying at home," said George Morris, M.D., vice president of performance excellence.

Patients will continue to meet with their regular provider. Video visits are available to patients of all CentraCare locations. CentraCare has dedicated additional staff to help patients learn how to use the technology. At this time, video visits are being scheduled for patients with chronic conditions who need to be seen in the next few weeks.

City of Paynesville declares "local state of emergency"

Friday, March 20: Considering the higher level directives and declarations, and in reference to Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 12, a local state of emergency has been declared, effective 12 noon on Friday, March 20, 2020, for the City of Paynesville, announced Mayor Jeff Thompson. The city's emergency operations plan has also been activated. This order remains in effect until 12 noon on Monday, March 23.

An emergency meeting has been called for 11:45 a.m. on Monday, March 23, to review the situation and potentially extend this declaration, per Thompson.

Paynesville City Hall (221 Washburne Avenue) is designated as the city's emergency operations center. Considering the level of this emergency, it will not be open 24 hours per day. Regular emergency contact methods are in effect, continued Thompson.

"For now, all city offices remain open and services continue, subject to a change of course," said Thompson. "Mediation methods have been and will continue to be in place. If possible, residents are asked to conduct city business by phone or electronically rather than in person."

"Emergency services director Thomas Fread and I thank our citizens, businesses, and guests for their patience and understanding so far. We ask for the same as we progress through this situation," continued Thompson.

Contact information, status updates, and continuing updates are and will be posted on the city's website, as well as distributed by other usual methods of city information.

State parks remain open, but visitor centers are closed

Thursday, March 19: Minnesota's public lands remain open, but the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has closed some buildings.

What's Open – State parks, state forests, recreation areas, and other public lands remain open. The following facilities will remain open at state parks: outdoor areas, campgrounds, camper cabins, yurts, remote campsites, overnight lodging facilities, and some group centers; and highway rest areas at Grand Portage, Gooseberry Falls, and Tettegouche.

What's Closed – Park offices, visitor centers, nature stores, trail centers, indoor interpretive exhibits, and enclosed picnic shelters. Most park bathrooms with running water are still closed for the season and will remain closed; any seasonal bathrooms already open will stay open.

Postponed Events – all safety education training, including firearms safety training; deer open houses; and elk input meetings in northwest Minnesota.

Canceled Events – All naturalist programs and public events at state parks are canceled until further notice.

Online and Phone Options – we urge the public to do business with us by phone, email, or online. Here are your options: buy or renew licenses online; make or change camping and lodging reservations online or by phone at 866-857-2757; call your local DNR office; use email or phone (888-646-6367) to request information from the DNR Information Center.

Questions? – Contact the DNR Information Center at 651-296-6157 or 888-MINN-DNR (646-6367). Email the center at info.dnr@state.mn.us. Hours are 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mondays to Fridays and 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Saturdays.