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Elected leaders working to reduce crowd sizes

BY JOSHUA MALONI
GM/Managing Editor

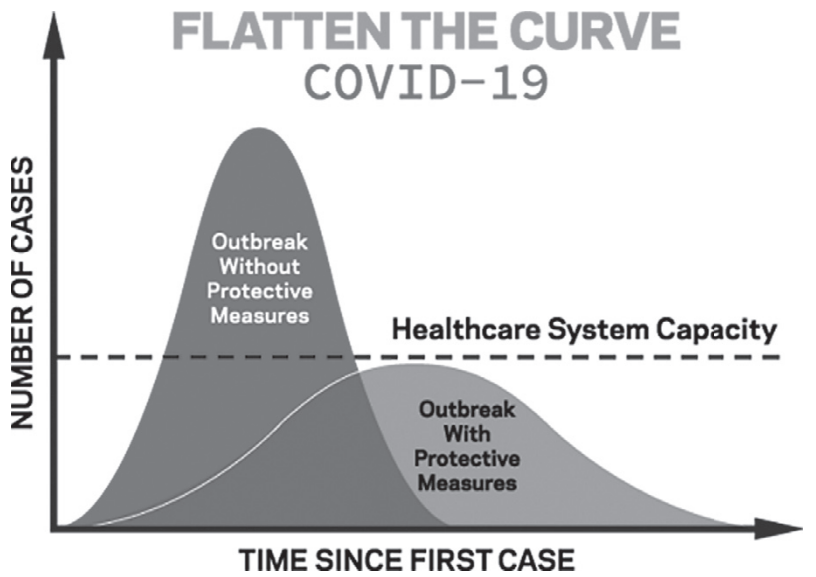
On Tuesday, Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed an executive order extending limitations he placed on social gatherings to slow the spread of COVID-19. His mandate, "which closed or otherwise restricted public or private businesses or places of public accommodation, and which required postponement or cancellation of all nonessential gatherings of individuals of any size for any reason (e.g. parties, celebrations, games, meetings or other social events) ... shall be continued ... until 11:59 p.m. on April 29, 2020, unless later extended by a future executive order."

Cuomo further stated, "The fine for such violation by an individual who is participating in any gathering which violates the terms of the orders or is failing to abide by social distancing restrictions in effect in any place which is not their home shall not exceed \$1,000."

In her LCTV community update Tuesday afternoon, Niagara County Legislature Chairwoman Becky Wydysch asked Niagara County District Attorney Caroline Wojtaszek about local enforcement of this executive order.

Wojtaszek said, for the most part, "The vast majority of people are doing their civic duty, and doing what they have to do: Staying home and staying safe, distancing from people. ... People are doing what they have to do to stop the spread of this virus," in terms of physical distancing.

However, she said, "There's always individuals or companies that are not following the rules, and that's significant, and that's



something we're going to take very seriously.

"We've looked for guidance on how to handle it. I think we received probably the best guidance recently from the governor and from the Department of Criminal Justice Services.

Wojtaszek explained, "We're not an investigative office. Law enforcement does our investigations for the most part. So, when we get a complaint, I forward that to the appropriate law enforcement agency to handle the investigation, of whether or not someone is actually, or some business, is actually in violation of the 'PAUSE' order.

"Then what happens is law enforcement's been tasked with going and trying to speak with that particular individual or that particular business to say, 'You cannot do this; there are repercussions to this.'

"I'm sure a number of people have heard already that the governor has upped the fine to \$1,000. He's taking it seriously - and it progressively gets more and more steep, the financial fines, as you continue to ignore our warnings.

"So, first we provide a warning: We ask you, we tell you, to please shut down whatever business, so that we don't spread the virus. Then we will proceed through the civil sanctions first. But, ultimately, we can make a criminal arrest, if owners of businesses continue

to defy our warnings, the sanctions and our order.

"We can charge with obstructing governmental administration criminally. What I've said to law enforcement - we talk about this every single day - I know they're out investigating, unfortunately, some businesses now. They will talk to me before making a criminal arrest, to let me know kind of the progressive steps that they've done to try to shut a business down, in compliance with the order. But we will ultimately bring criminal charges if we have to."

Preventative Steps

Measures have been taken in Lewiston to prevent crowds. Of course, nonessential stores are shut, restaurants are takeout or delivery only, the library is closed, and government buildings are only open to staffers on an as-needed basis.

In addition, Town of Lewiston Supervisor Steve Broderick on Monday said, "We were able to take down the rims at all the parks, except for Lewiston 2. But Lewiston 2 is fenced in, so a padlock was put on the gate up there.

"No matter what we said, the kids were still congregating, playing basketball.

"The parks are open for walking and keeping your social distance, but the basketball courts are closed."

Village of Lewiston Mayor Anne Welch said, "We closed **SEE RESOURCES, continued on Page 3**

Fish Fry Listings

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See more great places to enjoy a Fish Fry on page 7 of today's Tribune/Sentinel

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