



The Chairman's Corner

by

Matt B. Murell

Matt.Murell@ColumbiacountyNY.com

2/4/2021

A LOOK BACK AT COVID-19/PART TWO

Looking back at the coronavirus pandemic from the perspective of nearly a year, one thing that strikes me is how much all of us were forced to learn – in short order – new ways of operating in our new world. There were, as there continues to be, many confusing messages regarding the pandemic.

In early April, the prospect of obtaining coronavirus testing kits was bleak. The county Department of Health and county Office of Emergency Management were in the process of researching coronavirus test kits in an effort to identify what would best serve the county's needs.

At that time, New York State was reporting that 260,520 tests for COVID-19 had been administered around the state. Of that number, 102,863 yielded a positive result. Within the week, four county residents had died of COVID-19-related causes. County DOH, in partnership with Columbia Memorial Health, would ultimately conduct the first in-county testing clinic on May 8.

In mid-April, county Office for the Aging Administrator Kevin McDonald reported that while all county meal sites were closed, Meals on Wheels continued to be delivered. At the same time, the county Department of Health anticipated the delivery of 1,000 testing kits to be made soon. In addition, the wearing of a face covering when six feet of distance cannot be maintained between yourself and others was mandated by New York State. Later in April, with the recognition of the devastating effects the pandemic would have on our local economy, my office established Columbia County Comeback, a committee charged with assisting local businesses when the state allowed implemented its phased reopening plan. Ongoing pandemic-related information for businesses can be found at www.columbiaedc.com.

As early as April 26, county DOH Director Jack Mabb was predicting a COVID-19 resurgence in the fall and winter, which sadly we have seen come to fruition. It was also around this time that the phrase, "contact tracing," used to identify those who had come in contact with the virus and designed to hopefully lead to its containment, became a commonly heard term.

Mid-May saw businesses navigating the first days of the reopening of the economy under Phase One of New York State's New York Forward Plan. Phase One included businesses such as construction, manufacturing and wholesale supply chains; retail for curbside pickup and drop-off or in-store pickup; agriculture, forestry and fishing, among others.

Following a period of nearly two months, on Monday, June 15, all county buildings were re-opened to the public: "Buildings will be staffed at 50 percent, with virus-related safety precautions in place for both employees and the public," I said at the time.

Toward the end of June, we learned that New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut would now require A 14-day isolation of visitors from states experiencing coronavirus hot spots. According to Governor Cuomo, the states

with high enough infection rates to warrant the quarantine at that time were Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Washington, Utah, and Texas.

Next up: The quieter days of summer, followed by “the surge.”

This is part two of a three-part series.