

COVID-19 CRISIS

Southwestern Illinois copes with catastrophic coronavirus

By DENNIS GRUBAUGH

We are surrounded by the surreal, things that just don't seem to square with the routine.

Prayers abound, but there are no people in church. School is in session, but students aren't in them. Gathering spots, from the civic center to the county courthouse to the local pub, are empty.

Normally busy Main Streets are a ghost town, and not just on Sundays.

The "hardly roaring '20s" are eerily subdued, befallen by an unseen enemy that is playing no favorites, taking its toll on the old and the young, the rich and the poor, health-care workers and first responders, small and large businesses, the American workforce and the physical, mental and economic well-being of the entire world.

COVID-19 has drawn us together like nothing before by forcing us to keep our distance.

The pandemic has changed our way of life, and it looks to be that way for the foreseeable future.

"We have weeks to go," Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker said, as March came to a close.

The governor's stay-at-home order earlier in the month triggered a standstill at many

businesses — and a crush at others. Online sales surged. So did the lines at grocery stores. Toilet paper, a creature comfort since 1857, has become one of the most sought-after commodities on the market.

Here is a wide look at the ramifications felt in Metro East, from businesses and people in the middle of it all.

Essential and otherwise

Pritzker's edict laid the groundwork for the people who would be staying at home by declaring certain occupations and services as essential or not. The order was to be in place until at least April 7 and most people expect it to be extended. Federal guidance recommends people stay away from gatherings of more than 10 people. The president announced that social distancing is going to go on through April 30.

The list on the state website is a long one, but some of the essentials that remain open are health and safety institutions; businesses that provide necessary supplies and services; outdoor activity locations for such things as walking and biking, but not playgrounds; government functions; human services operations: any provider funded by



Separate views tell the story of what has faced grocery shoppers — including long checkout lines and some empty shelves. These scenes, provided by customers, are from inside the Schnucks store in Edwardsville.



DHS, DCFS or Medicaid; long-term care facilities; and home-based and residential settings for adults, children or those with disabilities.

Also allowed is essential infrastructure services, such as working in food production, distribution and sale; construction; building management; airport

operations; utilities; oil and biofuel refining; roads, highways, railroads, and public transportation and ports; cybersecurity operations; flood control; waste and recycling collection; and internet, video and telecommunications systems.

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With travel trade missions out, virtual exchanges might be next

By DENNIS GRUBAUGH

By its very nature, international trade is subject to understanding the needs of other countries, and now, perhaps for the first time ever, every country is wanting the same thing — a sense of calm.

"I'd like to get back to normal," said Collinsville businessman Craig Eversmann. "Get up, go to work in the morning and maybe have some fun along the way."

His somber tone is no different than most company heads these days. He ships his company's products around the globe. And, as world events have cascaded in recent weeks, it's almost impossible to predict what's going to become of the trading marketplace — or his customers.

Eversmann is owner of MSSC, LLC, and president of Southwest Illinois Trade & Investment Council, an organization that has spent the last

few years working in concert with the Illinois SBDC International Trade Center at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville to build local business by establishing markets for trade internationally and here at home.

The team met for a roundtable in March to discuss the results of a recent survey of local businesses to determine where those companies are wanting to do business and what their most immediate needs are. Predictably, attendees expressed concern about the world situation but they all essentially agreed they were in it for the long haul when it came to international business. The survey was done prior to the pandemic.

"The short-term discussion was everybody kibitzing about not being able to travel. But on the flip side we agreed the needs, wants and desires

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TIF districts, other incentives prove worthy in Metro East

By DENNIS GRUBAUGH

In 2018, when Glen Carbon called for the early retirement of the tax increment financing district that helped pave the way for much of the Cottonwood area redevelopment, the village affixed its seal to the success of such incentives.

From the time the village enacted the ordinance in 1995 until the TIF ran its course, the estimated assessed valuation of the land involved jumped from \$3.094 million to \$17.01 million.

"We closed it down at the end of 2018, about a year or two early," Village Administrator Jamie Bowden said. "It had met the obligations of the original developers' agreement."

Under TIF districts, money that would normally go toward property taxes is instead placed into an infrastructure fund to create the conditions that make it possible for developers to develop property for commercial use. Routinely, and for 23 years, taxing districts don't receive any money, but they do benefit from the

resulting increase in the assessed valuation. In theory, that means that when property does eventually come on to the tax rolls, the districts will be getting more than if the land had sat idle or remained blighted.

In Glen Carbon's case, there was money left over and a number of taxing districts benefited. Some \$1.43 million was returned to districts this past year. The largest amounts were:

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In trying to tell the story of the challenge of our times, we fall victim to the swiftness with which it has evolved. However, we continuously work to bring you the latest information about Southwestern Illinois and how it has fared in the age of COVID-19. Please check for daily updates on our website, ibjonline.com.

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