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FIGHTING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

County issues “Stay Home Work Safe” order

Effective thru April 3rd;
Virus cases reach 284

HARRIS COUNTY – Faced with the reality of mounting cases of the infectious and potentially lethal Coronavirus known as COVID-19, local leaders have issued an order to “Stay Home Work Safe” which amounts to a shelter in place directive.

At a joint news conference Tuesday morning, Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo and Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner called for all but essential members of the public to stay at home, not to travel and not to congregate in groups. Businesses were advised to have their employees work

at home. The order is set to last ten days, until Friday April 3rd.

As of Tuesday, there were 284 virus cases in the greater Houston area that had tested positive. These include Houston 55, Harris County 79 including 1 death, Brazoria County 28, Brazos County 16, Fort Bend County 46, Galveston County 21, Matagorda County 8, including 1 death, Montgomery County 23, Chambers County 1, Liberty County 1, Grimes County 2, Wharton County 3, and Walker County 1.

The Order allowed the



HARRIS COUNTY JUDGE LINA HIDALGO AND HOUSTON MAYOR SYLVESTER TURNER MAKE JOINT ANNOUNCEMENT TUESDAY MORNING.

public to travel for necessities such as food and fuel, and allowed workers in 16 essential categories to continue to work. These include: Healthcare, Law Enforcement and Public Safety, Food and Agriculture, Electricity or Utility workers, Petroleum, Natural and Propane gas workers, Water and Wastewater workers, Transportation and logistics, including auto repair and postal service, Public Works, Communications and Media including newspapers, Government and Education, Critical manufacturing, Hazardous materials, Financial services including banks, Chemical workers, and Defense industries.

Across Texas a number of cities and counties have issued stay-at-home orders. These include Austin, San Antonio, Dallas, El Paso, Fort Worth, and Houston. Many states have also issued such an order, such as California and Ohio, but Texas Governor Abbott has said he will not follow, because most of the counties in this large and often rural state have not reported any cases of the virus.

However, Governor Abbott did issue sever
See Stay Home, Page 6

Federal relief available for businesses and other tax filers impacted by COVID-19

Coronavirus Emergency Aid Package Signed

The legislation signed last Wednesday evening provides paid sick and family leave for some for U.S. workers impacted by the illness, expands unemployment assistance, includes nutrition assistance and increases resources for testing. Efforts are already underway to put together a third, larger relief measure that could total \$1 trillion.

Deadline for Tax Filing extended to July 15th

Following President Donald J. Trump's emergency declaration pursuant to the Stafford Act, the

U.S. Treasury Department and IRS issued guidance allowing all individual and other non-corporate tax filers to defer up to \$1 million of federal income tax (including self-employment tax) payments due on April 15, 2020, until July 15, 2020, without penalties or interest.

SBA to Provide Disaster Assistance Loans for Small Businesses Impacted by COVID-19

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) is offering designated states and territories low-interest federal disaster loans for working capital to small businesses suffering sub-

stantial economic injury as a result of the Coronavirus (COVID-19).

If you have a business that has been impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak, there may be resources available to you through the Small Business Administration (SBA). Authorities encourage to visit the Texas Department of Emergency Management webpage to learn more and fill out an Economic Injury Worksheet.

For additional information, please contact the SBA disaster assistance customer service center. Call 1-800-659-2955 (TTY: 1-800-877-8339) or email disastercustomer.service@sba.gov.

3 Virus test sites now open



INFORMATION ON CORONAVIRUS TEST SITES:

- United Memorial Med Ctr. private site at 510 w. Tidwell, as seen above is free, and does not require pre-screening.
- People tested at the community based testing site are provided instructions on how to obtain their test results. Positive cases will continue to be reported by local health departments.
- Harris County and the City of Houston have announced that they have opened three drive-thru testing sites for Coronavirus tests, and plan to open several more in the next week. For all the public sites, pre-screening is required, and then those that qualify due to Coronavirus symptoms, or because they are in a high risk category, will be given an ID number and an appointment at one of the locations, that remain unidentified to the general public.
- City of Houston, at Butler Stadium, call 832-393-4220 for pre-screening. Also free. At both sites, only those with symptoms will be tested.
- Harris County has one site open in East Harris County, in the Baytown area. Prescreening is done at readyharris.com or by calling 832-927-7575.
- Harris County plans to open a second site in the Katy area this week.

North Shore Jewelry Named One of Three Best in Houston

Founded in 1986, Pineforest Jewelry, Inc. has been named as one of Houston's Best Three Jewelry Stores for 2020. This is the third year in a row that Pineforest Jewelry has received this coveted recognition.

The company that critiques local businesses, “Three Best Rated”, is a nationwide organization dedicated to selecting the 3 best local businesses in every major city and nearly every business category from restaurants to insurance agents, doctors to hair dressers, and car dealerships to jewelry stores.

When asked for a comment, the owner of Pineforest Jewelry “Diamond Jim” Mills stated “We are very honored to have been



Pineforest Jewelry owner Jim Mills displays his Award Certificate in front of the business on Uvalde Road.

named one of Houston's Three Best Rated jewelry stores for the third year in a row”. Mr. Mills went on to say, “This is no easy task

considering Three Best Rated evaluates each busi-

See Best in Houston, Page 6

Governor Abbott postpones Runoff Primary Election until Tuesday July 14th.

AUSTIN, TX March 20, 2020 - Governor Greg Abbott today issued a proclamation postponing the runoff primary election until July 14, 2020 — the same date as the special election for Texas State Senate District 14. The runoff election was originally scheduled for May 26th, but has been postponed in conjunction with the state's ongoing efforts to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

The postponement of this election serves to help

fulfill the Governor's recent executive orders mandating certain obligation for Texans that are aimed at slowing the spread of COVID-19, including the encouragement of social distancing. Holding the runoff in May would cause the congregation of large gatherings of people in confined spaces and cause numerous election workers to come into close proximity with others. This would threaten the health and safety of many Texans.



Early voting for the postponed runoff primary election will begin Monday, July 6, 2020.

The Port of Houston is open for business

The Houston Ship Channel and the 200-plus private terminals and eight public terminals that comprise the greater Port of Houston remain operating and open for business following announcement by Harris County, Texas of a county-wide stay-at-home order. The ESSENTIAL

CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE WORKERS will remain on the job.

Employees supporting or enabling transportation functions such as maritime transportation workers, port employees, and truck drivers are considered essential critical infrastructure workers and the func-

tions they support have a special responsibility in these critical times to continue operations.

The greater Port of Houston sustains 3 million jobs and generates \$802 billion in economic value to the nation annually. To protect our residents,

America's energy supply chain, and the center of American exports, the Houston Ship Channel and the greater Port of Houston, including Port Houston's eight public terminals, must remain open for business.

The health and safety of Port Houston's public

terminal employees, users, customers, and the community remains the first priority. Safety protocols and measures have been implemented and are being regularly evaluated as this situation continues to unfold, and Port Houston will continue a close watch as

the COVID-19 public health matter develops.

Port of Houston thanks the men and women working on all the private and public docks, driving trucks in and out of the port, and the other maritime transportation workers, who all support the port's daily functions.

Governor announces federal funding distribution for COVID-19

AUSTIN - Governor Greg Abbott today announced that Texas has received \$36.9 million from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as part of the state's initial allotment of funding from the first emergency coronavirus bill passed by Congress. The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) will distribute \$19.5 million to 43 local health departments to aid in their COVID-19 response. This includes \$1.75 million for Dallas County, Tarrant County, and the San Antonio Metro Health District where operations have been impacted by federal activities. The remaining funds will be used by DSHS to support

operations in areas of the state not covered by local health departments and for statewide response activities. These funds will be used to strengthen Texas' community intervention efforts to slow the spread of COVID-19 and preserve critical healthcare, workforce, and infrastructure functions, while minimizing social and economic impact. In addition, these funds will be used to scale up Texas' surveillance, lab testing, and reporting capabilities. "The State of Texas is at a crucial stage in our COVID-19 response, and these funds are essential to supporting health authorities

throughout the state to scale-up testing and community intervention efforts," said Governor Abbott. "To ensure these resources are used swiftly and effectively, a majority of the funds will go directly to our local health departments which understand best the needs of their communities. I thank President Trump, the Texas delegation, and leaders in Congress for quickly passing this aid package. The State of Texas continues to work with federal and local partners to give our communities the resources and support they need as we work to mitigate the spread of COVID-19."

Governor Abbott, DPS waive expiration dates for driver licenses

AUSTIN – Governor Greg Abbott announced that he has directed the Department of Public Safety (DPS) to temporarily waive expiration dates for Driver Licenses, Commercial Driver Licenses, and other identification forms. This action falls within the Governor's State of Disaster Declaration and is part of the ongoing effort to re-

duce to spread of COVID-19. "Our top priority remains public health and safety, and we will continue to take action to ensure that Texans can avoid large public gatherings," said Governor Abbott. "Texas is at a pivotal moment in the response to COVID-19, and by tempo-

rarily delaying Driver License renewals we will help limit non-essential trips into public settings and slow the spread of this virus." This suspension will be in effect until 60 days after the DPS provides further public notice that normal Driver License operations have resumed.

Governor Abbott allows event permit refunds for businesses affected by COVID-19 cancellations

AUSTIN - Governor Greg Abbott announced that he is temporarily suspending certain provisions of the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Code to help businesses whose events were cancelled due to COVID-19. Suspending these provisions will allow for

refunds of application fees paid to obtain a temporary event permit for an event that was later cancelled. "With events and festivals across Texas cancelled, it is essential that we find ways to reduce the financial burden on event

organizers and the hospitality industry as a whole," said Governor Abbott. "By suspending these provisions, Texas is helping these businesses and organizations recoup some of the costs associated with their cancelled events."

List of cancellations in the area due to COVID-19

The containment of the Coronavirus has caused the following cancellations or postponements: Harris County and the City of Houston had adopted States of Emergency and Stay Home order thru April 3, 2020. Authorities will continue analyzing the situation and possibly extend order.

EDUCATION: The following School Districts have cancelled classes and events thru April 10: Aldine, Channelview, Crosby, Dayton, Deer Park, Galena Park, Sheldon, Goose Creek, Houston ISD, and Huffman. Free meals will be served by most districts on the days off. Many daycare facilities are starting open, with limited access. The Texas Education Agency and Governor Abbott have suspended the STAAR tests for this school year. Lee College and San Jacinto College cancelled classes until April 23 at which time they will hold online classes. Lone Star College facilities will be closed until April 6. Online classes resumed March 23 and all other classes resume April 13. Houston Community College extended cancelled classes through April 27, and the University of Houston will start remote classes April 23.

EVENTS Highlands, Crosby, and North Houston Little League Parade and Opening Day Postponed. Reset for April 6th or later. Any public event with over 10 attendees. San Jacinto Battle and Festival cancelled. Judge Stephens Teens Rock camp postponed and will be rescheduled. Pilot Club Bunco evening in Channelview has been cancelled. Dayton has cancelled the Mudbug Festival that was scheduled for April 4th. **PUBLIC FACILITIES:** Pct. 1 and Pct. 2 Community Centers closed. Houston Libraries and Harris County Libraries are closed indefinitely. Harris County Clerk's office is closed downtown and at the branches. Houston Parks Events cancelled. **ENTERTAINMENT:** Space Center Houston clo-



sure through April 12, Houston Zoo, Discovery Green events, Houston Ballet, Alley Theater, Disneyland, Disney World closed.

Alley Theater, Houston Symphony and Houston Ballet, cancelled.

SPORTS: Astros season opener moved to April.

Soccer, basketball rescheduled or cancelled, check with your team.

UH Men's Basketball, AAC tournament cancelled.

Olympics to be held in summer 2021 instead of 2020.

RESTRICTIONS: Access to most hospitals and VA Med Ctr. are limited.

Supermarkets have limited their hours to 8am to 7pm or 8pm.

Most shopping malls have changed their hours, from noon to 7pm.

Note: this list is changing daily, check with your event prior to attendance.

Governor Abbott takes action to expand nursing workforce

AUSTIN – Governor Greg Abbott has waived several regulations to help meet Texas' growing need for nurses as the state responds to the COVID-19 virus. The Governor's actions will expand Texas' active nursing workforce by doing the following:

- Allowing temporary permit extensions to practice for graduate nurses and graduate vocational nurses who have yet to take the licensing exam.

- Allowing students in their final year of nursing school to meet their clinical objectives by exceeding the 50% limit on simulated experiences.

- Allowing nurses with inactive licenses or retired nurses to reactivate their licenses.

"In the coming weeks and months, Texas will continue to see a growing need for medical professionals to help us respond to these unique and challenging

times," said Governor Abbott. "With these actions, Texas is taking an important step to meet that need. Nurses are essential to our ability to test for this virus, provide care for COVID-19 patients, and to continue providing other essential health care services. Suspending these regulations will allow us to bring additional skilled nurses into the workforce to assist with our efforts and enhance our COVID-19 response."

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COMMUNITY NEWS

San Jacinto College postpones May commencement

PASADENA, Texas – Due to the ongoing COVID-19 situation in our region, San Jacinto College will postpone its May 15 Commencement ceremony. “This was a very difficult decision,” said San Jacinto College Chancellor Dr. Brenda Hellyer. “We know that graduation is a time when our graduates and their families should

celebrate their academic achievements. For me, this is my favorite part of my job, celebrating with students who have overcome much to get to this point. However, we have to keep the health and safety of all of our College community in mind. We are committed to finding the best solution possible for our graduates

and their families once this the Coronavirus situation is over.” A new date or other arrangements will be announced as they are available. For up-to-date information on the San Jacinto College altered operations period during COVID-19, visit sanjac.edu/coronavirus.

San Jacinto College transitioning to altered operations during COVID-19

Online and hybrid course delivery to begin on Monday, March 23

PASADENA, Texas — In a special meeting of the San Jacinto College Board of Trustees on Tuesday, March 17, 2020, Board members approved a resolution that allows the College to move to altered operations during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) situation. The altered operations will begin on Monday, March 23, 2020, and will continue for the foreseeable future. As the COVID-19 situation develops, the College will make operational decisions about how to proceed at that time. As of Monday, the following will apply: - All general education courses will be delivered online. - All technical courses will be delivered through a combination of online and

face-to-face by appointment, and in groups of no more than 10 people total. Students will be contacted by their individual faculty member with details. - College staff will work remotely unless otherwise directed by their leader beginning at 8 a.m. on Friday, March 20, 2020. - All College facilities will be closed unless otherwise noted for face-to-face course delivery. No visitors and no students other than those notified by their faculty are allowed. “We understand that this is an unprecedented situation for our region, our state, and our country,” said Marie Flickinger, Chair of the San Jacinto College Board of Trustees. “The health and safety of

our students, employees, and community is most important. The Board is amazed at the work completed by the faculty, staff, and administrators who have worked tirelessly this week to ensure that we have a plan in place to help our students complete this semester and to keep College operations running in this altered operations period.” The College has set up a COVID-19 webpage to keep students, employees, and the community informed during this altered operations period. Additional information may also be distributed to students through Blackboard. The resolution remains in effect until it is rescinded by the Board of Trustees.

Suspect sought in shooting of woman found on Mercury Road

Houston police have released surveillance video and a surveillance photo of a vehicle involved in the fatal shooting of a woman at 10298 East Freeway (East Interstate Highway 10) service road about 8:35 p.m. on Sunday, March 22.

According to Houston Police Officials, The victim, Teasia Woods, 29 met with the suspect, who was driving a white Hyundai Genesis. When Woods entered the Hyundai, the suspect suddenly drove away. The suspect drove at a high rate of speed eastbound on the East Freeway service road before turning southbound on Mercury Drive.



Suspect's vehicle, a white 2010 Hyundai Genesis 3 with Texas license plates MMV-8512

Witnesses observed Woods fall out of the passenger side of the Hyundai onto the roadway. It was determined she had been shot and was transported to Ben Taub General Hos-

pital where she died. Anyone with information in this case is urged to contact the HPD Homicide Division at 713-308-3600 or Crime Stoppers at 713-222-TIPS.

Governor Abbott announces Federal Grant for Senior Citizen meals

AUSTIN - Governor Greg Abbot announced that Texas has received a \$16.2 million grant from the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Administration for Community Living (ACL) to help communities provide meals for older adults. The grant was part of a \$250 million dollar outlay authorized by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, signed into law by President Trump on March 18, 2020. Originally created by the Older Americans Act (OAA) of 1965, these programs pro-

vide meals to more than 2.4 million older adults nationwide each year, both through home delivery and in places like community centers. “This grant is especially timely given the disproportionately high toll that COVID-19 has been taking on seniors around the world,” said Governor Abbott. “As social distancing measures increasingly and appropriately limit people's social mobility, it is imperative that alternate means for feeding our state's elderly like Meals on Wheels receive addi-

tional resources to handle the growing need.” Texas will receive its proportional grant, \$16,205,796, second only to California (\$25 million) and Florida (\$18 million) this week for further distribution to local meal providers. Older adults who need assistance can contact the Eldercare Locator to find services available in their community. The Eldercare Locator can be reached at 1-800-677-1116 or <https://eldercare.acl.gov/>.

Harris County Tax Office eliminating services inside offices



Property Owners, Commercial Customers, Automobile Dealers/Title Services and Volunteer Deputy Voter Registrars Asked to Use Tax Office Drop boxes Harris County Tax Assessor-Collector & Voter Registrar Ann Harris Bennett announces that Tax Office operations will continue during the COVID-19 pandemic by using drop box payment methods for property owners, Volunteer Deputy Voter Registrars, commercial customers, automobile dealers and title services beginning Wednesday, March 18, 2020. “All Harris County Tax Office locations will eliminate direct customer service transactions for the safety of our employees and the community,” Bennett said. “The Tax Office is not closed. Employees will continue to provide services to those who usually visit a Tax Office location by accepting transactions by drop box or mail. Customers are also encouraged to use the Tax Office website to conduct all other business.” Property owners may make payments in person by using a Tax Office drop box located at the Harris County Administration Building at 1001 Preston Houston, TX 77002. Only checks, money orders or cashier's checks will be accepted. The drop box will be located in the first floor lobby. The property tax drop box will be available for use from 7 a.m. – 6 p.m. Property owners can print their receipts online at www.hctx.net. Property owners can also pay their property taxes by mailing a check, money order or cashier's check to Ann Harris Bennett, Tax Assessor-Collector & Voter Registrar, P.O. Box 4622, Houston, TX 77210-4622. Payments can be made online by credit card at www.hctx.net or by free e-check by telephone at 713-274-CARD (2273). Individuals making requests for Alcohol Permits, Tax Certificates and Coin-operated Machine permits must drop off their re-

quests and payments made by check, money order or cashier's check at the Harris County Tax Office Distribution Center at 11525 Todd Road, Houston, TX 77055 between 8 a.m. – 9:30 a.m. There will be no exceptions made for individuals arriving before or after the specified hours. Property owners may request property tax payment plans by calling 713-274-8000, or by sending an email to tax.office@hctx.net. Additional information is available on the Tax Office website at www.hctx.net. Automobile dealers/title service companies and their representatives, and financial institutions may drop off their transactions at any open Tax Office branch or the Harris County Tax Office Distribution Center at 11525 Todd Road, Houston, TX 77055 during 8 a.m. – 9:30 a.m. Only checks, money orders or cashier's checks will be accepted. Transactions will be limited to 30 per person. Completed transactions will be available for pick up from 3 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. There will be no exceptions made for individuals arriving before or after the specified hours. All downtown commercial customers may drop off their completed paperwork at any open Tax Office branch or the Harris County Tax Office Distribution Center at 11525 Todd Road, Houston, TX 77055 between 8 a.m. – 9:30 a.m. Only checks, money orders or cashier's checks will be accepted. Transactions will be limited to 30 per person. Completed transactions will be available for pick up from 3 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. Again, there will be no exceptions made for individuals arriving before or after the specified hours. Mechanic liens must be dropped off at the Harris County Tax Office Distribution Center at 11525 Todd Road, Houston, TX 77055 between 8 a.m. – 9:30 a.m. or sent by mail to Ann Harris Bennett, Tax Assessor-Collector & Voter Registrar, P.O. Box 4089, Suite 215, Houston, TX 77210.

Identification badge issuance for title services and their representatives has been canceled for March and April. New or renewal title service applications may be made by mail at: Office of Ann Harris Bennett, Tax Assessor-Collector & Voter Registrar, Attention: Special Investigations Unit, 1001 Preston St., Houston, TX 77002-1839. Applications may be dropped off with a check, money order or cashier's check at the Harris County Tax Office Distribution at 11525 Todd Road, Houston, TX 77055 during the hours of 8 a.m. - 9 a.m. There will be no exceptions made for individuals arriving before or after the specified hours. Registered voters who need to update their voter registration information, or individuals who would like to register to vote should visit the Texas Secretary of State's website at www.sos.texas.gov. All Volunteer Deputy Voter Registrars (VDVRs) should drop off their completed voter registration applications at the Harris County Tax Office Distribution Center at 11525 Todd Road, Houston, TX 77055 between 8 a.m. – 9:30 a.m. Receipts will be available for pick up from 3 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. There will be no exceptions made for individuals arriving before or after the specified hours. The “five day” rule of turning in the voter registration applications will still apply with the exception of the applications due the next day after the voter registration cutoff date. VDVRs should call 713-274-8387, or send an email to voters@hctx.net to request a drop off and pick up time for VDVR supplies at the Distribution Center. The Kyle Chapman and Jim Fonteno Harris County Tax Offices are closed until further notice. The public is encouraged to follow the Harris County Tax Office on social media for updates and information on Tax Office closures and cancelled office events. Have any questions? Please reach out to us at 713-274-8387 or voters@hctx.net

Major Disaster Declaration issued for Texas

AUSTIN – March 25, 2020 – Governor Greg Abbott released a statement thanking President Trump for issuing a Major Disaster Declaration for the State of Texas. This announcement comes after the Governor requested the declaration—citing the need for additional federal assistance to save lives, to

protect property, public health, and safety, and to lessen or avert the threat of COVID-19. “Texas is aggressively pursuing and implementing all necessary strategies to limit the impact of COVID-19, and I thank President Trump for his swift action to issue a Major Di-

aster Declaration for the State of Texas,” said Governor Abbott. “The President's declaration opens up new sources of funding for individual and public assistance that will help Texas respond to this public health emergency and protect public health and safety.”



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★ OPINION PAGE ★



Social Security Matters

by AMAC Certified Social Security Advisor Russell Gloor
Association of Mature American Citizens

Ask Rusty – Using IRA instead of Claiming SS; Disability Appeal

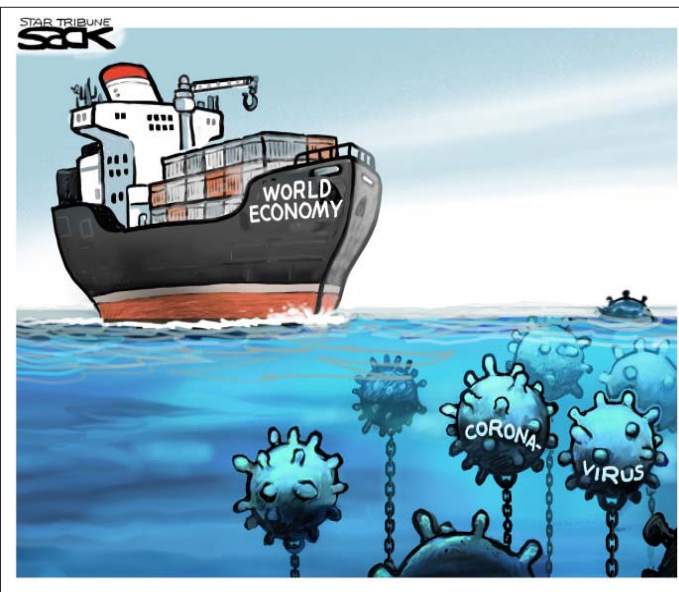
Dear Rusty: I am currently unemployed and drawing funds from my IRA. I am 62 years old. My financial adviser instructed me to not take Social Security because once I do that the percentage of increase would stop. He said to wait until the benefits increased to the point where I could then take Social Security and leave my IRA alone. Does that seem right? Also, I have applied for SS Disability benefits and have been rejected, but I am currently appealing that decision. Is my next step a lawyer? If so do you have any recommendations? Signed: Befuddled

Dear Befuddled: If you take your Social Security (SS) benefits at age 62, your payment will be cut by about 27.5% from what it would be at your full retirement age of 66. If you wait, your SS payment when you claim it will have grown for each month you delay. You only get 100% of the SS benefit you have earned from a lifetime of working when you reach your full retirement age (FRA). The rate of benefit growth before you reach your FRA is a bit more than 6% for each year you wait, so I expect that your financial advisor compared that guaranteed growth to the interest you are receiving on your IRA and concluded that waiting to claim a higher SS benefit for the rest of your life is a better deal. Provided you are in good health, that seems like a prudent suggestion. And just so you are aware, if you delay claiming SS beyond your FRA, you'll earn an additional 8% for each year you further delay, up to age 70 when your SS benefit would be about 75% more than it will be if you take it now.

Regarding your disability appeal, I cannot recommend a specific attorney, but I suggest

you seek one who specializes in Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) claims. SSDI attorneys must adhere to Federal law and they are limited in what they can charge you. Usually that limit is 25% of whatever back SSDI benefits they can secure for you (paid from those back benefits) to a maximum of \$6000. There should be no charge for an initial consultation, and you shouldn't be required to pay anything unless they win your case for you. The easiest way to find someone to assist you is to do a search for "SSDI attorneys near me" and then do some initial research on your search results before selecting. You'll be able to judge the strength of your SSDI appeal by whether the SSDI attorney accepts your case – they'll only accept your case if they believe they can win and be compensated for their efforts. Only you can judge if engaging an attorney is a wise idea at this point. You still have multiple SSDI appeal levels available to you, and an SSDI attorney can be engaged at any point you choose.

This article is intended for information purposes only and does not represent legal or financial guidance. It presents the opinions and interpretations of the AMAC Foundation's staff, trained and accredited by the National Social Security Association (NSSA). NSSA and the AMAC Foundation and its staff are not affiliated with or endorsed by the Social Security Administration or any other governmental entity. To submit a question, visit our website (amacfoundation.org) / programs / social-security-advisory or email us at ssadviser@amacfoundation.org.



Governor takes actions to slow down deadly virus

STATE CAPITAL HIGHLIGHTS

By Ed Sterling

AUSTIN — Texas is more invested every day in promoting increased and thorough hand washing, disinfecting surfaces and social distancing to reduce cases of the rapidly spreading novel coronavirus, COVID-19.

As of March 22, the cumulative count of patients testing positive in Texas increased to 334. The death count stood at five with 8,756 people having been tested, according to figures posted by the Texas Department of State Health Services.

As the work week began, Gov. Greg Abbott was still not ready to order all Texans to stay at home, as local authorities ordered in Dallas County. However, he issued four statewide executive orders in accordance with federal guidelines issued by President Trump and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

—Every person in Texas shall avoid social gatherings in groups of more than 10 people;

—People shall avoid eating or drinking at bars, restaurants and food courts or visiting gyms or massage parlors — provided, however, that drive-thru, pick-up or delivery options are allowed and highly encouraged throughout the limited duration of the executive order;

—People shall not visit nursing homes or retirement or long-term care facilities unless to provide critical assistance; and

—Schools shall temporarily close.

Abbott's orders, effective through 11:59 p.m. on April 3, are subject to extension.

Texas Department of State Health Services Commissioner John Hellerstedt also declared a public health disaster last week.

Hellerstedt's declaration allows state and local health authorities to more easily require property owners to disinfect, decontaminate, and seal off property that might be contaminated by COVID-19.

The declaration also:

- Authorizes health authorities to take control measures to eradicate the threat to public health;
- Streamlines the process for health authorities to invoke the courts to enforce quarantines of individuals; and
- Activates enhanced tools for DSHS to collect disease and health information and to share that information with law enforcement personnel and first responders, as appropriate.

Governor activates Guard

Gov. Abbott on March 17 activated the Texas National Guard to be prepared to assist with response efforts for COVID-19, ensuring that the military force can assist in various forms throughout the state when needed.

Healthcare workers and first responders who are members of the Texas National Guard are excluded from this activation so that they can continue serving the people of Texas in their respective fields, Abbott said.

SBA assistance requested

Gov. Abbott on March 17 requested designation from the Small Business Administration to access the federal agency's Economic Injury Disaster Loan program for the entire state.

If granted, Abbott said, the Small Business Administration would provide long-term, low-interest loans to qualifying businesses across the state.

Small business owners are invited to visit the Texas Division of Emergency Management website: <https://tdem.texas.gov/covid-19/> where they will be directed to an online application on the SBA website.

19/ where they will be directed to an online application on the SBA website.

Telemedicine to increase

Gov. Abbott on March 17 waived certain regulations and directed the Texas Department of Insurance to issue an emergency rule relating to telemedicine care in mitigating the spread of COVID-19.

Abbott said his actions build upon previous waivers of portions in the Occupations Code to expand provider flexibility in providing medical services over the phone.

Medical providers seeking guidance on the impact of the new rule can expect guidance from the Texas Medical Board to be issued in the coming days. Insurers seeking guidance on the emergency rule should contact the Texas Department of Insurance or visit their webpage for more information.

Goal: Stop transmission

The Texas Department of Transportation on March 17 announced actions to help reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

TxDOT postponed or canceled its in-person public hearings and gatherings through April 3, subject to change. However, work on projects to improve our transportation system continues, as does TxDOT's ongoing work to maintain and operate our state's transportation system.

Meanwhile, TxDOT has closed the lobbies of its 12 Travel Information Centers until further notice, but outside restrooms will remain available at all times and will be regularly cleaned between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Also, safety rest areas on highways throughout the state will remain open.

AG: Price-gougers beware

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton on March 21 warned retail suppliers, including those who supply grocery stores and pharmacies, that state law strictly prohibits price gouging in the wake of a disaster.

Price gouging laws apply to any person or entity selling necessities at an exorbitant or excessive price after a disaster has been declared by the governor or president. This prohibition includes those who supply retailers.

Under the Texas Deceptive Trade Practices Act, Paxton said, any price-gougers may be required to reimburse consumers and may be held liable for civil penalties of up to \$10,000 per violation with an additional penalty of up to \$250,000 if the affected consumers are elderly.

THE POSTSCRIPT By Carrie Classon

"Waiting for the Sun"

An enormous box arrives at our house. It is filled with food and cleaning supplies and, yes, toilet paper. I feel guilty. But the truth is, these supplies were ordered months ago. My husband, Peter, was a hoarder long before hoarding was in fashion.

"Here you go!" Peter says, as he unpacks the latest shipment. "Eight more pounds of oatmeal!"

My oatmeal consumption over the past few weeks while writing would certainly set some sort of record had I been keeping track. Peter pulls out a one-gallon bottle of hand sanitizer—also ordered before everyone in the world wanted it.

"You see?" he says, brandishing the bottle with more than a touch of pride, "I was a germaphobe before germaphobes were cool!"

And it's true. Peter has always had a slightly higher-than-average concern about germs. We live in a small town, with no regular job to go to and no children to care for. Add to that Peter's insistence that we have a four-month supply of all the essentials, and our lives have been less affected than anyone I know.

My parents are in Florida and it looks like they will be staying there for the indefinite future. Normally, they'd be heading back north, but they don't know where they'd stay on the way home and, with everything so uncertain, they're staying put. They are in their 80s so, naturally, I worry. But my mother seems pretty calm.

"We don't play bingo!" she explains, as if bingo was the primary source of the contagion. She tells me they've shut down the pool and the Internet room and the woodshop where my dad likes to go. "But not pickleball!" she tells me. Pickleball games continue, with or without a pandemic.

Before the restaurants were shut down, we had dinner with our scientist friends, Mary and Wolfgang. It's nice to have the news digested and parsed by scientists. But they were not terribly reassuring. "I've been washing my hands until they're chapped!" Mary complained. Their son has just started work as an EMT and Mary feels certain he will contract the virus. She is afraid—but he is young and strong and helping people. She is proud of him.

The hardest hit are, of course, the very old and the very sick. My brother-in-law is both. Peter's oldest sister's husband is dying of Alzheimer's and now she cannot visit him. Everyone in the nursing home is so fragile that they have shut the door to visitors.

"He won't understand why no one is visiting!" she tells us, and I'm sure this is true. I don't know how much he understands about anything at this point but he certainly will not comprehend that a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic is preventing his wife from seeing him.

"I've been thinking, maybe I could look at him through the window," she says, and my heart breaks a little, imagining her standing outside the window of the nursing home in the early spring cold. The nursing staff promised they would let her come when her husband is dying. No one knows when that will be.

For those of us who have it easy, life is not much different and not so very difficult. For those who already have too much on their plate, these times are almost too much to bear.

Peter read somewhere that the sun was good at killing the virus. I hope this is true. I know the sun provides cheer and we could certainly use some more of that. So, right now, I'm watching the sky and waiting for the sun.

Till next time,
Carrie

Carrie Classon's memoir is called, "Blue Yarn." Learn more at CarrieClasson.com.

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CHARLOTTE'S WEB



Learning to Live Differently

As I awoke at 2 a.m., I began to replay conversations from the past few days. Perhaps for the first time in years, I was wishing I did not live alone. If things go the way many are speculating, it might be weeks or even months until we get the next hugs.

Hugs have always been an important part of my life, at least during my adult life. When attending the University of Texas in Austin, I took my first of many psychology classes and learned that research has shown that if you get or give at least three hugs a day, your mental state is most often “happier” and that you will learn to have many more days filled with opportunities to share optimism than if you stay to yourself.

I have often joked that when I get to Heaven, that St. Peter will have to go enjoy something new, as I was going to take his place at the pearly gates

and be the official greeter. And anyone who has been around me knows that greeting comes with a hug. Yet now, just days before my 58th birthday, I am being told that we cannot hug, we should not be in groups larger than 10 and that we should avoid any social activities. Can you imagine? For decades, I have been greeting at church services, Chamber luncheons, meetings and many public events. And now, I guess I can wave and smile to the few people I will be seeing.

Being a single mother who has lived alone the majority of the time since my youngest entered the Army in 2011, my life has been blessed to be a part of many groups and organizations that work in the community. Everything from comforting a young mom in prison, to offering my cell phone to a homeless person to use has provid-

ed opportunities to hug them, to pray with them and to try to brighten their lives.

Suddenly, I find myself more thankful than ever to have a position where I can reach out to senior adults and check on them via the phone. So many of them have stories to share and by the time you hang up, you cannot help but be thankful for the time you chatted with them. In these “different” days that we are living in, pick up your phone, look through your contacts and make a call or two. Brighten up the day of someone you have not talked to lately. Reach out to those parents who are “homeschooling” right now and see if you can assist in any way. Take the time to turn off all electronics and listen as you read a book. Start making that bucket list for your next vacation. Learn to enjoy the time with yourself.

A MESSAGE FROM PCT. 2 COMMISSIONER



Dear Community

We hope you and families are safe during this difficult time. We are reaching out on behalf of Harris County Precinct 2 Commissioner Adrian Garcia to humbly request your help. Commissioner Garcia has asked us to do everything we can to get critical and factual information to residents about COVID-19 (Coronavirus). We understand you are a trusted leader in your area and we ask you to please share the following message with your NextDoor page/Neighborhood message board/Facebook group/email distribution list.

If you are developing symptoms (dry cough, fever, body aches) that lead you to believe you have COVID-19 (Coronavirus), health care professionals don't want you to rush to doctors' offices, urgent cares, or emergency rooms, unless you are in a critical situation. Harris County Public Health has launched a telephone resource for residents of Harris County that may not have access to healthcare and are looking to visit a doctor due to coronavirus-related care. The call center, called “Ask My Nurse,” will help patients assess symptoms assessments and refer patients to appropriate level of care in a clinical setting. Experienced nurses are available to help you and answer your questions from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m., 7 days a week. Nurses will be available to provide care in both English and Spanish. The number to call is 713-634-1110.

Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns. It's vitally important that you share this information to the folks living in each and every neighborhood in Precinct 2 and across Harris County.

I hope you are all managing your new normal with the kind of grace and goodness that you freely exhibit – only from a distance!

I am here for you. Please feel free to reach out to me during this time. Be well – and stay that way!

IN THE STARS

BIRTHDAYS

Mar 19–Yvonne Browder
Isabell Daniels
Annie Mari-e Herron
Chris Scott
Jett Sherwood

Mar 20–Josh Kimberlin

Mar 21–Crystal Burton
Jerry Eversole
Kathy Townsend

Mar 22–Craig Gross
Lisa Strouhal
Laura White

Mar 23–Jackie Thompson
Charlotte Wotipka

Mar 24–Lindsey Bell
John Townsend
Mary Helen James

Mar 25–Tara Barron
Mike O'Conner

BIBLE TRIVIA

by Wilson Casey—

1. Is the book of Numbers in the Old or New Testament or neither?
2. In Luke 11, what group of people did Jesus say took away the key of knowledge? Prophets, Carpenters, Lawyers, Scribes
3. Whose son, Mahershalahashbaz, is the longest human name in the Bible? Judas, Enoch, Isaiah, Abednego
4. The Ark of the Covenant was carried around and around what city? Ramah, Moroni, Jericho, Nicopolis
5. From John 13, who said to Jesus, "Thou shalt never wash my feet"? Paul, Peter, Andrew, Thomas
6. Who was Jonah's father? Eli, Joppa, Tirzah, Amittai

ANSWERS: 1) Old; 2) Lawyers; 3) Isaiah; 4) Jericho; 5) Peter; 6) Amittai

THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE

Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord.
His going forth is established as the morning; He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth.

HOSEA 6:3

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PHILIPPIANS 4:13

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-LaoTzu

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ROMANS 8:18

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ASK THE EXPERT

Stay Home,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

al executive orders on March 19, which included the following regulations:

- Every person in Texas is to avoid social gatherings of more than 10 people.

- No dining in at restaurants, bars, or food courts. Take out, drive-thru and delivery options will be allowed.

- Gyms are to remain closed.

- Schools are to remain closed, but online or alternative learning options may be used.

- No visitations at nursing homes, retirement centers, or long-term care facilities unless it is to provide critical care assistance.

THIS IS NOT A SHELTER IN PLACE ORDER. You can still go to grocery stores, pharmacies, gas stations, parks, and banks. Essential government services and critical infrastructure still operational, and domestic travel allowed.

These orders got into effect on March 20, 2020 and will end at midnight on April 3rd.

The pandemic has spread quickly through the United States, and the rest of the world. Worldwide figures indicate that more than 380,000 have been infected and tested positive, and more than 16,000 have died. Countries with the most cases include China, Italy, United States, Spain,

Germany, Iran, France and South Korea. Italy has the most deaths, over 6000.

Texas has reported statewide over 355 cases, with 6 deaths.

PCT. 2 COMMISSIONER ADRIAN GARCIA ON STAY-AT-HOME ORDER:

In reaction to Judge Lina Hidalgo's decision to issue a county-wide stay at home order in Harris County, Precinct 2 Commissioner Adrian Garcia released the following statement:

"Today, Judge Hidalgo is making a true leadership decision. It is a very tough, yet extremely prudent choice, but her compass is to find the best possible path that could wind up saving lives of many Harris County residents. The reason for Judge Hidalgo's decision is not solely of her choosing, however, and a stay-at-home order in Harris County comes after careful deliberation and counsel from many health care and business leaders. With what we've seen in other parts of the country, I agree we can't afford to delay, and for my Precinct 2 family, I welcome her decision. This is the best hope for Harris County to prevent a widespread disaster, harming all of us that live, work, and play in this county. I strongly support the order from the Judge. Too many of our neighbors' lives are at stake."

ASK DIAMOND JIM

Diamond Jim: "Fear can bring out the best, and the worst..."



During World War II, the entire country worked together to build ships and planes. They country worked to feed all of the families in the USA. Neighbor helped neighbor and stranger alike. With rare exception, people didn't hoard food or supplies because the Government stepped in and made sure that food was available for everyone. They issued "War Ration Booklets" that contained a few sheets of perforated stamps. This is what was used to buy toilet paper, meat, cheese, eggs and other supplies. By the end of World War II, everyone was proud to be an American. The enemy had been defeated (Germany) or surrendered (Japan).

Well folks, this is our "World War II" event. Many businesses have closed ... most temporarily but some permanently. We all have friends and family members out of work today. Perhaps even you are no longer working, afraid of what the future holds and uncertain when you'll be back to work. Many businesses and organizations can't afford to pay employees during this time of layoffs. So, now what?

The television media has done an amazing job of creating mass hysteria, fear, and panic among us. We have allowed television "programming" to do just that, program us into sheep that must believe and comply with every word they speak through that idiot box called a tv. I see that most people can't or won't think for themselves anymore. Had society reacted this way in 1941, we might not even be the United States of America right now. Think about that for a moment!

During the past three weeks, I have seen the best in people and unfortunately, I have seen the worst. We made the choice to remain open to serve our customers. You can imagine my surprise when one of them decided to steal the had soap from the restroom. A staff member alerted me that she had a suspicion this was the same customer who stole the previous hand soap container 3 weeks prior to her theft this morning. I stopped the woman outside and told her to give the soap back to me. I told her she should be ashamed of herself and that she was not welcome back in our store. She got into her car and left.

Like I said, I've recently seen the best and the worst in people. Now is the time that we need to pull together and support each other. Ask for help if you need something, don't just take it at the expense of another person. Remain optimistic. Be a part of the solution, not a part of the problem. We are here for you and we always will be. I wish you peace.

Thank you for reading the "Ask Diamond Jim" column and for supporting the North Channel Star Newspaper!

Diamond Jim is a diamond dealer and precious metals broker of NTR Metals. See more at: www.pineforestjewelry.com.

If you have questions pertaining to jewelry, watches, diamonds, precious stones, precious metals, and other questions related to the jewelry industry, email jmills@pineforestjewelry.com.

***Due to the Stay at Home order by Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo, Pineforest Jewelry will be close thru April 3, check www.pineforestjewelry.com for select styles.*

CHARLOTTE'S WEB



Adjusting

Like many of you, I am missing the one-on-one interaction with others. I miss the hugs at work, at church and throughout the week. I miss passing through my office building and catching up on details of the lives of others in the community. I have also adjusted to listening to multiple press conferences daily as well as "hearing" the quietness of my home.

It has taken getting accustomed to, but we have had to ask friends and family not to call during working hours. Most of them would never dare to call us between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., yet a friend shared that one person has sent over 45 texts a day until my friend asked her not to communicate during those hours. Imagine the frustration of our elders who never worked on work at home, now trying to understand their children and grandchildren "working from home" in their pajamas?

One friend who was sent home to work suddenly wants her employer to pay for her internet as well as furnish a laptop. The employer basically told her to furnish her own or the job could be eliminated. I am just happy that I can trade out using my own equipment, for not having to use my gas and car to get to work. I know I am saving money on dry cleaning and while working from home, I can easily step into the kitchen and make something for lunch as well as eat in the comfort of my own home much cheaper and easier than leaving my office for lunch.

There are some professions that are surely dealing with the "stay home" situation much worse than others. Educators do not serve in public schools for the money or the benefits. Ask any teacher and they will tell you they do it because they love seeing students learn. They see each day to make a difference in the lives of the younger generation. So many of them are now home and offering tutorials over the computer. Yet they are missing the daily interaction of the classroom. Those teachers who are parents of school-aged children are really having a hard time adjusting. Imagine working with younger children and now your high school son needs help with his math?

Those who are having to work as if nothing is going on, are certainly in need of our prayers. There are those in health care, law enforcement, first responders, truck drivers, grocery store employees and the food industry who are working either too many or too few hours. They are still trying to budget their money and their resources. They need their rest.

There are also some people who simply do not want to listen to what the authorities are asking of us. Not wanting to name any names, but each day I have reminded two senior citizens that even if they do not get in their car and put on 15-30 miles each day, the car will still operate when it is safe to get out.

Let's learn something as we adjust and start sharing what we have learned.

Best in Houston,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

ness on a 50-point inspection including the business's reputation, history, complaints, ratings, proximity, satisfaction, trust, cost, general excellence, reviews, and more. It's my understanding that as part of their evaluation process, Three Best Rated also has its employees secretly visit each business to verify for themselves several of the criteria and standards needed to receive this rating. Thank you very much

for recognizing the quality of our small business, Pineforest Jewelry".

It's good to know that quality and excellence is still recognized from time to time. We should all be proud when one of our own local businesses is realized as being one of the best. Please join us in commending Pineforest Jewelry and the many other small businesses in our communities.

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