

# Shelter in Place...from Page 1A

sneezes; clean and disinfect surfaces and regularly used items. For more information, visit CDC.gov.

Here in Georgia, Gov. Brian Kemp continued to underscore the seriousness of the situation by extending his statewide shelter-in-place order through April 30. The original order began April 3 and was set to expire after April 13.

"All of the provisions of the statewide shelter-in-place order will remain in effect," Kemp said in his April 8 news conference. "I want to thank everyone who has followed these directives; I certainly applaud your patience."

He also extended the state's Public Health State of Emergency through May 13, which requires the Department of Public Health to compel "certain individuals with an increased risk of complications from COVID-19 to isolate, quarantine or shelter in place."

Additionally, he signed yet another executive order closing a limited number of "Vacation Rentals" through April 30.

His decision to shut some short-term rental properties came after conversations with Georgians and local leaders, many of whom have expressed their concerns that the state was becoming a "vacation destination," Kemp said.

The executive order targeting vacation rentals seems to take aim specifically at Airbnb-type arrangements, prohibiting rentals wherein residential property owners lease their properties to private persons through third-party brokers for terms less than 30 days.

Explicitly excluded in the order are hotels, meaning buildings that have "five or more hotel rooms under common ownership." Also excluded are motels, extended stay hotels, campgrounds, and "purely commercial transactions."

All state, county and local law enforcement officers are authorized to enforce the order, with violations being considered misdemeanors. However, no law enforcement officer or any other official may "dispossess or evict occupants of Vacation Rentals to enforce this order."

Kemp has justified his decision to keep public recreation areas open by saying people appear to be following social distancing guidelines on beaches and in state parks, and he said it's important for residents to have exercise outlets, especially since his shelter-in-place order closed gyms.

Much of the criticism surrounding keeping state parks open stems from local communities' fears of exposure to COVID-19 by out-of-town visitors, as well as potential exhaustion of local resources such as groceries, supplies, first responders, hospital beds, etc., by people traveling for simple leisure and exercise.

The CDC and President Donald Trump have advised Americans to "avoid discretionary travel," which would presumably include leisure travel. The president's Coronavirus Task Force has even asked people to avoid travel of any kind in the short term.

Multiple news sites, including the Chattanooga Times Free Press, reported over the weekend that DNR Commissioner Mark Williams decided Saturday to close Cloudland Canyon State Park after flying over in a helicopter during a pre-arranged visit and seeing traffic backed up in and out of the park.

Williams will reportedly be meeting with the governor this week to decide whether or not to continue keeping state



Some kindly individual(s) created this inspirational chalk message on the sidewalk outside of the Hiwassee Post Office recently. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

parks open, including Vogel in Union County.

Cloudland Canyon is in Dade County, which is one of the signatory counties included in a letter by commissioners of 12 North Georgia counties submitted to Kemp last week asking that state parks be shut down to limit travel-related spread of COVID-19 amid the statewide shelter-in-place order.

Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw should be counted among the various local leaders pressing for greater restrictions on travel between communities, as he was one of the 12 commissioners to sign the letter to Kemp.

Nearly all state parks remained open at press time. For status updates on DNR State Parks, visit [gastateparks.org/alerts](http://gastateparks.org/alerts).

Addressing another issue, Kemp has expressed his reluctance to close churches amid complaints that many worshipers have not been complying with social distancing guidelines, though he did ask church leaders and parishioners on Good Friday to abide by the shelter-in-place order.

"To all Georgians attending religious services this weekend or celebrating Easter this Sunday, I am pleading with you to not attend any services in person," Kemp said.

Under the order, no more than 10 people are allowed to gather in a single location, including at churches and in businesses, unless social distancing of at least 6 feet between people can be maintained at all times, with exceptions for individuals living together and entities defined as "Critical Infrastructure" by the order.

Also last week, Kemp activated another 1,000 Georgia National Guard troops "to assist in the COVID-19 emergency response," bringing the total number of active troops to 3,000.

So far, the troops have been supporting "medical assistance teams, foodbank operations, isolation facilities and staffing the Georgia Emergency Management Agency's State Operations Center in Atlanta," according to MilitaryTimes.com.

In effect since April 3, the shelter-in-place order requires residents and visitors of the state to remain in their residences and take "every possible precaution to limit social interaction to prevent the spread or infection of COVID-19."

People are allowed to

travel for things like work, groceries, medicine, takeout food, doctor's appointments and exercise, though they must practice social distancing if they leave their homes.

Among other things, people may also travel to support dependent family members and for children to gain access to public internet to meet "educational obligations," as school campuses have been closed for the remainder of the year.

The interior dining areas of restaurants remain closed, and other than certain short-term rentals, as well as businesses expressly closed by the governor — places requiring close physical proximity like movie theaters, bars, gyms, barber shops, nail salons, etc. — most businesses may continue to operate provided they follow specific guidelines established by the state.

Kemp has signed an executive order giving local sheriffs' offices and deputies the ability to enforce the shelter-in-place order by closing businesses and organizations that don't comply. Anyone convicted of violating the order will be guilty of a misdemeanor.

The original shelter-in-place order also enshrined Second Amendment protections around the state, guaranteeing that the sale, dispensation and transportation of firearms and ammunition may continue unimpeded.

Notably, the April 3 order resulted in the suspension of all local ordinances responding to COVID-19, thereby preventing counties and cities from adopting "more restrictive or less restrictive" measures to mitigate virus impacts at the local level.

For example, Towns County previously closed hotels, vacation rentals and campgrounds to discourage the movement of people who might spread the virus, though Gov. Kemp's order negated the county's local measures.

To read "Critical" versus "Noncritical" infrastructure guidelines for businesses staying open, as well as all the recently signed executive orders, visit Kemp's website at <https://gov.georgia.gov/executive-action/executive-orders/2020-executive-orders>.

For CDC guidelines, visit [coronavirus.gov](http://coronavirus.gov). To follow the virus' spread via the Georgia Department of Public Health COVID-19 Daily Status Report, visit <https://dph.georgia.gov>. To find more local resources, check out <http://www.townscountyga.org/covid-19-info.html>.

provided the perfect opportunity to test the tour out in Towns County.

"This isn't an original idea of mine, as other communities have held Easter Bunny Tours prior to this year," Wagner said. "I have always liked the idea, and in these ever-changing times, adapting ideas like this one helps us celebrate the best way we possibly can."

Kids also received special Easter treats this week with the meal delivery service that drops off food to schoolchildren.

"We have Easter Eggs bagged up and ready to send on the bus for the kids' meal delivery stops on Monday," Wagner said.

Wagner and the Chamber of Commerce are thankful to the Towns County Recreation Department for providing the eggs for the delivery service, and thankful as well to United Community Bank for loaning them the Easter Bunny costume.

# Henderson...from Page 1A

swab," Henderson said. "It didn't hurt, but it wasn't something that I'd want to do again. I tried to give them my insurance card, but they said there was no charge."

After driving straight to Gainesville, Henderson returned home right after the test without making any stops to begin a waiting game that lasted until Monday, April 6.

Despite her symptoms improving and her fever subsiding, Henderson never left her property during the nine days of self-quarantine. Unfortunately, before Henderson had even gotten tested, rumors began circulating that she was positive for COVID-19.

"After Monday, my temperature was back to normal, but it was still kind of nerve-racking for me because I was by myself researching the virus and watching a lot of videos on it," she said, noting that her husband trains local law enforcement in Afghanistan. "That's also when all the rumors started."

"During that same time was when someone (from Towns County) was transported to Union General (in Blairsville),

and the very day I got tested was when the rumors started that I came back positive.

"That made me a little frustrated, because there was some crazy stuff going around about me. I was on social media a lot, and some things were being said — not about me personally — but they made me worry that I would be ostracized if I did come back positive.

"It's sad that would happen, but at the same time, I understand it, too, because I don't know for certain how I would react to being around someone that has it."

During that stretch, Henderson spent a lot of time mentally retracing her steps to see if she could figure out how she may have been exposed to the virus, as well as who she might have exposed to the virus in turn.

"I was calling those people every day and asking them if they had any symptoms," she said. "They all told me no, so that made me confident that it was just going to be my sinus issues."

Upon finally learning she was in the clear, Henderson asked for written proof to put

the rumors to bed once and for all. Chief Smith also gave her the option of returning to work later that same evening, which for Henderson was a no-brainer.

"They called me from Gainesville on (April 6) around lunch to tell me I was negative, and I had them email me a copy of my results to send to Paul," she said. "I went back to work the same night, and that's probably the happiest I've ever been to go to work."

When asked what positives she took away from the experience, professionally, Henderson said the situation has made her more cautious in a line of work that's prone to physical contact with total strangers.

And on a personal level, she is thankful for friends who brought her needed items during the quarantine, and for the community members who remained supportive.

"This whole experience has opened my eyes," Henderson said. "I was always careful before, but this has made me more careful. I'm also thankful for everyone that encouraged and prayed for me, everyone that brought me stuff or offered to bring me things. I appreciate them all so much."

# COVID-19...from Page 1A

Also last week, the Cherokee County, North Carolina, Health Department reported that a Cherokee County resident employed as a health care worker in Georgia had tested positive for the virus.

There has been some speculation on social media and in the community that the Cherokee County resident and the Chatuge Regional employee are one and the same, though the Towns County Herald was unable to confirm this information by press time.

Cherokee County health officials, who are actively tracing contacts of the North Carolina resident, said on Facebook that "the decision to test was not communicated to the Cherokee County Health Department until (April 9), when the test result came back positive."

The North Carolina-based Health Department also said that the resident/health care worker in question "was not informed to isolate after being tested," which runs counter to information provided by Union General about the Chatuge Regional employee.

"Our employees have received education on COVID-19 signs and symptoms and the CDC guidelines surrounding this illness, including isolation precautions," Union General said Friday. "All employees are screened daily prior to working with temperature check and screened for any signs or symptoms of COVID-19."

Union General Health System continues to monitor CDC and (Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services) guidance related to COVID-19 and will continue to collaborate with the (Georgia) Department of Public Health."

Perhaps significant, Union General issued its press release on April 10 — the day after the Cherokee County Health Department posted about the Georgia health care worker on Facebook.

Union General doesn't usually comment on details of individual cases, though with the Chatuge Regional employee, the Health System said it wanted to ensure "the community has accurate information," and that "inaccurate statements are corrected."

Separately, Health

System Administrator Daniel said she would like to put to rest any rumors regarding COVID-19 cases going unreported by the hospitals in Towns and Union counties, saying that all positive cases are reported to the appropriate authorities as mandated by state law.

"We care for patients from the entire region, and those cases are credited to each patient's place of residence per the Department of Public Health," Daniel said. "We as a hospital have no control over the speed or accuracy of the DPH map."

The Georgia Department of Public Health said recently it was working to correct internal reporting errors related to its Daily COVID-19 Status Report, which can be found at <https://dph.georgia.gov/covid-19-daily-status-report>.

"Union General Health System implements best practices in compliance with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Georgia Department of Public Health guidance," Union General said. "Patient safety and ensuring the highest quality of care is a priority for the entire Union General Health System."

# Election...from Page 1A

will give the Secretary of State's Office and counties time to shore up contingency plans, find and train additional poll workers, and procure supplies and equipment necessary to clean equipment and protect poll workers.

Emergency authority is something that should be exercised carefully, and moving an election should only take place in the rarest of circumstances.

While Raffensperger previously expressed concern that he did not have the authority to move the primary election again, the governor's extension of the state of emergency to a time that includes almost every day of in-person voting for a May 19 election is sufficient to allow the secretary to exercise the emergency authority given to him by O.C.G.A. § 21-2-50.1 and move the primary election to June 9.

"I certainly realize that

every difficulty will not be completely solved by the time in-person voting begins for the June 9 election, but elections must happen, even in less than ideal circumstances," Raffensperger said.

"Just like our brave health care workers and first responders, our county election officials and poll workers are undertaking work critical to our democracy, and they will continue to do this critical work with all the challenges that the current crisis has brought forth," Raffensperger continued.

"This postponement allows us to provide additional protection and safety resources to county election officials, poll workers and voters without affecting the November election."

The voter registration deadline for the June 9 election will be May 11. Early voting will begin on May 18. Pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 21-2-501, moving

the primary election to June 9 will move the primary runoff to Aug. 11.

Pushing back the primary to June 9 gives Georgia election officials additional time to put in place contingency plans to allow for safe and secure voting, but pushing back the primary election any further could potentially have negative consequences on preparation for the Nov. 3 General Election.

Given existing deadlines to prepare and send ballots for the November election, particularly for military voters, moving forward on June 9 is the best way to ensure a successful election year in Georgia.

Absentee ballot applications for the upcoming primary election will continue to be accepted and processed by counties even if the application said May 19.

Once county election officials properly verify the signature on the application, the voter will be sent an absentee ballot for the primary election, now to be held on June 9.

# Towns County High School's 2020 DAR Good Citizen

Julia Chinkhan of Hiwassee is Towns County High School's 2020 DAR Good Citizen. The DAR Good Citizens program encourages and rewards good citizenship in an outstanding high school senior. To receive this recognition Julia has exhibited the qualities of a good citizen in her home, school, and community.



Julia Chinkhan

Miss Chinkhan is the daughter of Stevan and Jacqueline Chinkhan. She has two older brothers, Steven and Christian Chinkhan.

The Old Unicoi Trail Chapter of DAR annually sponsors the Good Citizen Program in Towns, Union and Fannin counties. A school's DAR Good Citizen receives a DAR Good Citizens pin, certificate, and a wallet recognition card. Additionally, the student may write an essay to compete for a scholarship. Julia's essay answered the question, "You and your peers are our nation's leaders of tomorrow. How would you energize American's youth to fully engage as effective citizens? Why is that important?" Julia's essay emphasized three requirements she sees as essential to energizing youth to be good citizens: engaging in one's community to serve others; having

a purposeful cause and understanding its value to the community; and possessing a passion to act in such a manner that will be a positive influence in one's community. For her Good Citizen status and essay entry Julia will receive one hundred dollars from Old Unicoi Trail.

Julia has been a member of the Indian Raider Marching Band's Color Guard for three years, acting for two years as Captain. She served on the United Community Bank Junior Board of Directors. For three years she directed the yearbook and was co-editor for one year. Miss Chinkhan has been a Beta Club member for three years and also served on the Junior Board of Local Government

organized by Towns County Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw to allow students an opportunity to get an insight into what a County Commissioner does and how the County is run. Julia, a member of HOSA (Health Occupations Students of America) for four years, competed at its 2020 Leadership Conference.

Julia plans to pursue a baccalaureate degree in nursing at Wesleyan College. After completing her degree, she wants to gain varied work experiences in different departments of different hospitals. Her goal is to work in a children's hospital where she can combine her nursing education and valuable experience with her compassion to help those in need.

To be selected by TCHS Julia demonstrated during her high school career the qualities of Dependability (truthfulness, honesty, punctuality, etc.); Service (cooperation, helpfulness, responsibility, etc.); Leadership (personality, self-control, initiative, etc.); and Patriotism (unselfish loyalty to American ideals). Congratulations to Julia Chinkhan.

For more information on the Old Unicoi Trail Chapter, DAR, contact the Chapter at [oldunicoitrail@gmail.com](mailto:oldunicoitrail@gmail.com).

# Easter Bunny...from Page 1A

of isolation from others.

"Easter is definitely going to be different this year," Wagner said last week. "But I don't want the kids to think that the Easter Bunny has been quarantined, too."

"The kids are missing their friends, relatives and teachers. They can't have sleepovers, playdates, or play sports, and some are too young

to even understand what is going on. I just hope this spreads some Easter cheer and brings a little joy to the kids during this unfamiliar time."

Wagner got the idea for the Easter Bunny Tour after seeing other areas and communities host them over the years. Given the unique situation of everyone having to shelter in place, this year

provided the perfect opportunity to test the tour out in Towns County.

"We have Easter Eggs bagged up and ready to send on the bus for the kids' meal delivery stops on Monday," Wagner said.

Wagner and the Chamber of Commerce are thankful to the Towns County Recreation Department for providing the eggs for the delivery service, and thankful as well to United Community Bank for loaning them the Easter Bunny costume.