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The Herald-Palladium

WEEKEND EDITION
JUNE 5-6, 2021

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Berrien County COVID-19 cases plummet

Region boasts lowest number of new cases since July 2020; no deaths this week

By ALEXANDRA NEWMAN
HP Staff Writer

The number of new COVID-19 cases this week in Berrien County dropped to levels that haven't been seen since last summer.

The county recorded 39 new COVID-19 cases this

week, down from 86 cases last week and 126 cases the week before. The county hadn't recorded under 50 new cases in a week since early July 2020.

With the incredible drop in new cases has also come a steady number of recoveries and fewer deaths.

Berrien County recorded 268 recoveries this week and no new deaths.

With deaths and recoveries, the county is at about 446 active COVID-19 cases. That's down from 675 last Friday and 852 the Friday before that.

COVID hospitalizations at Spectrum Health Lakeland continue to trend downward as well.

The hospital averaged about 12 COVID-positive patients

a day this week. That's down from an average of 16 a day last week and 19 per day the week before.

Michigan did not update its COVID-19 vaccine data before press time Friday.

Berrien County was nearing 50 percent of residents (12 and up) with at least one dose mid-week.

To explore the most up to date vaccine data, by county, visit michigan.gov/COVID

Vaccine and click on "Access state's vaccine data."

Van Buren, Cass

The number of new COVID-19 cases in Van Buren and Cass counties continued their descent this week.

Van Buren County recorded 20 new COVID-19 cases this week and no new deaths. The county recorded 58 new cases last week and 48 new cases the week before.

Cass County recorded 15 new COVID-19 cases this week and no new deaths. The county recorded 22 new cases last week and 40 new cases the week before.

In total, Van Buren County has recorded 6,637 COVID-19 cases and 115 deaths. Cass County has recorded 4,774 cases and 71 deaths.

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Photos by Don Campbell / HP staff

Mary Nykamp, a civil engineer / project manager at Wightman, works on a project at her desk at the company's Benton Harbor office on Thursday. Nykamp returned to her office three weeks ago after working from home since last year due to the pandemic.

Back to the water cooler

Companies adjust as workforce returns to offices

By TONY WITKOWSKI
HP Local News Editor

Parking lots are expected to fill up this summer, as thousands of Southwest Michigan employees return to the workplace following a 15-month hiatus.

Since June 1, workers who have been working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic were able to return to in-person work after 55 percent of the state's adult population received at least one dose of the vaccine.

"Humans are social creatures. I think there is so much to be gained by human interaction," said Matt Davis, president of Wightman. "There are a lot of benefits for working remotely, but there's a lot of joy that comes from getting together. I'm looking forward to more of that."

Davis said employees have already begun returning to the architectural and engineering firm's offices throughout the region.

In May, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer shared an updated workplace guidance from the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA). Employers may now allow fully vaccinated employees to not wear face coverings and



Wightman is using a hybrid model with employees working both from home and at the company's Benton Harbor office.

social distance, provided they have a policy to ensure non-vaccinated individuals continue to follow these requirements.

Whirlpool Corp., one of the largest employers in the region, is taking a phased approach in bringing employees back to its Twin City locations.

Carey Martin, senior vice president and chief human resources officer at Whirlpool, said they began to allow vaccinated office employees to return to the company's buildings as of June 1 — with a 50 percent capacity limit in mind.

The format will stay in

effect through the summer months and change again after Labor Day weekend. On Sept. 7, both vaccinated and unvaccinated employees will return with the option of working virtually two days a week.

"We've learned a lot over the last 18 months," Martin said, as a number of Whirlpool offices around the world were affected sooner than ones in Berrien County. "We wanted to prioritize our employees' health and safety and to strike the right balance. We've learned new ways about keeping the facilities clean and disinfected and stressing the importance

of social distancing."

Martin said they're hopeful workers come back on a voluntary basis over the next three months.

As of last week, about 25 to 30 percent of Whirlpool's workforce has returned to buildings in the Twin Cities. Martin said engineers and lab technicians working with products have already been at their respective facilities because their jobs required it.

During the transition, the Benton Harbor appliance maker is not asking its vaccinated employees to wear

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Man charged in Benton Twp. fatal shooting

By JULIE SWIDWA
HP Staff Writer

BENTON TOWNSHIP — In a strange turn of events, a man who was shot earlier this week is now a murder suspect.

James Parker-Hersey, 18, of Benton Harbor, was arrested in connection with the shooting death of Miquan Davis, 20, also of Benton Harbor. Parker-Hersey was arrested on charges of felony murder, armed robbery and felony firearms, according to a news release.

Benton Township police were called at about 11:30 p.m. Wednesday to an area on Union Street outside the Briarwood Apartments on a report of a shooting.

There, they found Parker-Hersey with a gunshot wound to the left hip. He was taken by Medic 1 ambulance to Lakeland Medical Center, St. Joseph, where he underwent surgery for the non-life-threatening injury, police said.

Meanwhile, Davis was driven to Lakeland with a

gunshot wound to his chest, and was pronounced dead at the hospital. Detective Lt. Michael DenDooven said Davis had been a passenger in the car when he was shot.

Parker-Hersey had told police at the original scene that he was standing outside, heard gunshots and realized he'd been shot.

Witnesses told police that what had started as an armed robbery situation resulted in several gunshots being fired.

DenDooven said that following further investigation, Parker-Hersey was arrested Thursday without incident.

The Berrien County Sheriff's Department Evidence Technician Unit assisted Benton Township police at the scene.

The investigation is ongoing and anyone with information is asked to call the Benton Township Police Department's Detective Bureau at 925-1135 or Crime Stoppers at 800-342-STOP.

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Facebook suspends Trump for 2 years, then will reassess

By BARBARA ORTUTAY
AP Technology Writer

Facebook announced Friday that former President Donald Trump's accounts will be suspended for two years, freezing his presence on the social network until early 2023, following a finding that Trump stoked violence ahead of the deadly Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol.

At the end of the suspension, the company will assess whether Trump's "risk to public safety" has subsided, Nick Clegg, Facebook's vice president of global affairs, wrote in a blog post. He said Facebook will take into account "external factors" such as instances of violence, restrictions on peaceful assembly and other markers of civil unrest.

Facebook also announced that it would end a contentious policy that automatically exempted politicians from rules banning hate speech and abuse, and that it would stiffen penalties for public figures during times of civil unrest and violence.

The former president called Facebook's decision on the suspension "an insult." The two-year ban replaced a previous ruling that ordered Trump to be suspended indefinitely.

"They shouldn't be allowed to get away with this censoring and silencing, and ultimately, we will win. Our Country can't take this abuse anymore!" Trump said in a news release.

Social platforms like Facebook and Twitter have

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Sunday Weather

High 84 Low 66



6 50645 49086 7



Don Campbell / HP staff

Many employees at Whirlpool Corp.'s Global Headquarters are still working from home due to the pandemic.

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masks. However, it is still a requirement for those who haven't gotten a vaccine.

"We are not requiring employees show us proof of vaccinations," Martin said. "Our values rely on integrity and trust, so we are giving our employees the benefit of the doubt. We have offered an incentive to employees to get the vaccine so we can keep track of capacity numbers."

A change in lifestyle

Whirlpool, a global company, has taken region-specific approaches to reopening.

As of Friday, the company's locations in Iowa, Oklahoma, Massachusetts and all of the Twin Cities have been deemed "mask free."

"We have dashboards tied into every one of our locations," she said. "Those dashboards tell us every day what the community rates are and an approximate idea of the number of employees who are vaccinated. We look at that data and determine what's appropriate when it comes to health and safety measures."

Martin said the idea of allowing Whirlpool employees to continue remote work through the summer was meant to give them plenty of notice.

"We acknowledge people's lifestyles and habits have changed since going fully remote," Martin said. "... We chose this timeline so they could make personal family adjustments to get ready. We know school and children are a big consideration. We wanted to allow for the timing of their return to coincide with schools going back in session."

Martin said Whirlpool officials agreed to the option of working remotely two days a week beginning in September, but will evaluate its effectiveness over the next

couple months.

The company already had flexible work options, but Martin anticipates remote work to be a more common practice following the pandemic.

"We know certain types of work are conducive to being done in a work setting," she said. "We want to take this slowly and we want to do this right."

'Learn together as we go'

Wightman is taking a unique approach at its Southwest Michigan offices.

Instead of instituting a company-wide policy, Davis said they plan to leave work options up to managers and their employees.

"Do we classify people's jobs and have them come in based on what they do?" Davis said. "For the past year, we trusted them to make decisions about millions of dollars for clients and the company. So we decided to let them and their managers choose if they can work remotely."

By the end of 2020, Wightman officials were planning for a return to the office on a hybrid model.

Together, the company's administration drafted a plan with the operations team. However, there were more questions than answers at that point when it came to state restrictions.

When changes appeared to be on the way in the spring, Davis said they pulled out the plan and dusted it off.

"We've empowered them to come back in, when they need to," Davis said. "We still have a lot of parents with kids in school, who don't have day care. We'll just learn together as we go. If we need to modify our plan by the end of June, we'll do that."

Wightman offices remain closed to the public, but Davis said they still require unvaccinated employees to wear masks.

"We're a very trusting en-

vironment, so we're not requiring any proof of it," he said in reference to vaccination cards. "There's a mix of people in the office wearing masks and not wearing masks."

Davis said they've been able to operate across multiple offices through the help of its IT department.

At the beginning of the pandemic, employees were given a \$200 allowance to ensure they could effectively work from home.

"We can ping someone on Microsoft Teams through our Kalamazoo or Allegan offices," Davis said. "That's something we want to carry forward in our new work environment. The key will be good communication."

A focus on fall

Lake Michigan College not only had to worry about its students, but its employees throughout the 2020-21 school year.

Denise Eberth, executive director of human resources at LMC, said the college is asking its staff to spend 50 percent of their time on campus – instead of having everyone come back simultaneously.

"We just looked at it as a gradual return to make it an easier transition for employees who have been working from home," she said.

Eberth said LMC will review MIOSHA and Berrien County Health Department recommendations to see if a return to full capacity is feasible in the fall.

The college is also in the process of updating its COVID-19 plan and other guidance documents. Eberth said LMC's website will also be updated.

"We've tried to stress to employees to take on safety measures for people and to have their concerns in mind, as well as make this the safest transition possible," she said.

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Dispute over Flint bone scan device heats up in water cases

FLINT (AP) — Lawyers are defending the use of a handheld device to check for lead in Flint residents, despite the manufacturer's warning that it wasn't designed for that work.

The bone scan device has been a source of controversy with people who were exposed to lead-contaminated water in Flint.

Some doctors believe the device is risky, especially for children. Meanwhile, lawyers without access to one have complained that their clients could lose out on higher compensation without bone scan results.

The maker, Thermo Fisher Scientific, said in a May 12 letter that the device wasn't designed to measure bone lead levels in people, though the company has supported research on a "limited number of occasions" with universities. The company's website says the device typically is for mining and exploration.

The letter was sent to Napoli Shkolnik law firm, which has extensively used the device on Flint clients who volunteer, the Detroit Free Press reported.

"That's a pretty powerful statement, because the manufacturer would obviously make more money selling more of these," said Mark Cuker, a rival attorney in Flint who provided the letter to the newspaper.

In a recent court filing, attorneys Paul Napoli and Corey Stern defended the device and attached affidavits from experts.

"There is no risk to patients from the use of the device and no lead shielding is required while administering the exam," said Yuwonia Speights-Beaugard, director of radiology services at Hurley Medical Center in Flint, who has visited the site where scans are performed.

Thousands of Flint residents have signed up for a portion of a \$641 million lawsuit settlement, mostly

paid by the state of Michigan, for lead-contaminated water in 2014-15 and a fatal outbreak of Legionnaires' disease.

The settlement has received preliminary approval by a federal judge but much work remains, including a fairness hearing in July.

Cuker has complained that only Napoli clients have had access to the bone scan device.

Dr. Lawrence Reynolds, a Flint pediatrician who has objected to the device, said there is no evidence that anyone has been harmed, but he considers the use unethical. Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, credited with helping expose the Flint water crisis, also opposes use of the scanner.

Bone scan results are not required to make a claim in the Flint settlement, but residents "could voluntarily undergo that process based upon the advice of their lawyers," said Lynsey Mukomel, spokeswoman for the Michigan attorney general.

U-Michigan won't drop GOP donor's name over 'witches' remark

By ED WHITE
Associated Press

DETROIT — The University of Michigan will keep the name of a prominent Michigan Republican on a campus building despite his description of Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and two other Democrats as "witches."

President Mark Schlissel said he shares the disgust over Ron Weiser's "misogynistic and violent comments." But he also noted that Weiser "has done much good" and that the naming of a building was part of a donation agreement.

"It is important to all those who enter into agreements with the university that we maintain our reputation for

honoring our contracts," Schlissel wrote in a Thursday letter to people who want Weiser Hall to be renamed.

"In addition, were we to decide to violate the contract and remove his name from a building, we would be obligated to return the associated gift," Schlissel said.

Weiser is chairman of the Michigan Republican Party, a philanthropist and an elected member of the university's governing board.

In March, he called Whitmer, Attorney General Dana Nessel and Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson "witches" during a meeting of Republican activists. He said the GOP would pre-

pare for a "burning at the stake" in the 2022 election.

Weiser later said his words were "poorly chosen." Democrats, who are a majority on the university's Board of Regents, issued a censure or formal statement of disapproval.

In his letter, Schlissel said peoples' lives are "complex and sometimes even contradictory."

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LEGISLATIVE ROLL CALL

Senate Bill 458, Require governor notify legislature when traveling out of state: Passed 20 to 16 in the Senate

To require that when leaving the state and on return, the governor must notify the lieutenant governor, and require this person to notify legislative leaders in writing within 12 hours.

21 Sen. Kim LaSata R – Bainbridge Township Y

26 Sen. Aric Nesbitt R – Lawton Y

Senate Bill 458, Irwin legislative leader "domestic terrorist" amendment: Failed 16 to 20 in the Senate

To add an exception to SB 458, waiving the "governor has left the state" reporting requirement for a legislative leader believed to present "a security risk to this state because of his or her affiliations with a domestic terrorist organization." This was proposed by Sen. Jeff Irwin, D-Ann Arbor.

21 Sen. Kim LaSata R – Bainbridge Township N

26 Sen. Aric Nesbitt R – Lawton N

Senate Bill 429, Establish sand and gravel mining regulatory regime, fees: Passed 19 to 17 in the Senate

To impose a state permit mandate on "aggregates" mining (sand and gravel), which are needed for road repair and reconstruction projects. The bill would preempt locally imposed restrictions and permit requirements (with exceptions), and authorize a \$5,000 permit application fee.

21 Sen. Kim LaSata R – Bainbridge Township Y

26 Sen. Aric Nesbitt R – Lawton Y

House Bill 4631, Reduce a limit on government "civil asset forfeiture" takings: Passed 77 to 33 in the House

To create an exception to a 2019 law that prohibited government "civil asset forfeitures," which are takings of property that may be associated with a suspected drug-related crime, unless the individual is actually convicted or accepts a plea bargain. That only applies

to police seizures of property worth \$50,000 or more, and the bill would lower this to \$20,000 for property seized by public airport authority police.

59 Rep. Steve Carra R – Three Rivers N

66 Rep. Beth Griffin R – Paw Paw Y

78 Rep. Brad Paquette R – Niles N

79 Rep. Pauline Wendzel R – Coloma Y

80 Rep. Mary Whiteford R – South Haven Y

House Bill 4823, Shift more online gambling tax revenue to horse race industry

To remove a cap on the amount of state online gambling tax revenue that can be given to the horse race industry and tracks. Fiscal agency analysts note this could cause a modest reduction in revenue for schools.

59 Rep. Steve Carra R – Three Rivers N

66 Rep. Beth Griffin R – Paw Paw Y

78 Rep. Brad Paquette R – Niles Y

79 Rep. Pauline Wendzel R – Coloma Y

80 Rep. Mary Whiteford R – South Haven Y

House Bill 4667, Ban government "vaccination passport": Passed 62 to 47 in the House

To prohibit the state or local governments from producing or issuing a COVID-19 vaccine passport, subject to a \$1,000 penalty per violation. The bill would also ban governments from providing an incentive to a person to require or use a vaccination passport.

59 Rep. Steve Carra R – Three Rivers Y

66 Rep. Beth Griffin R – Paw Paw Y

78 Rep. Brad Paquette R – Niles Y

79 Rep. Pauline Wendzel R – Coloma Y

80 Rep. Mary Whiteford R – South Haven Y

SOURCE: MichiganVotes.org, a free, non-partisan website created by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, providing concise, non-partisan, plain-English descriptions of every bill and vote in the Michigan House and Senate. Please visit www.MichiganVotes.org.

Y = Yes, N = No, X = Not Voting



NOTICE FOR BIDS

The Township of New Buffalo is soliciting sealed bids for the sale of real property located in the Township of New Buffalo. Sealed bids will be received by the Township Board at its offices, 17425 Red Arrow Highway, New Buffalo, Michigan 49117 until 3:00 P.M. on June 16, 2021. Bids can be mailed, dropped in the drop box or hand delivered to Township Hall, but must be at the hall by 3:00. Bids will be opened at 3:00, June 16th in the Township Hall meeting room. Opening is open to the public and results will be announced.

The property is located at 19001 US Hwy 12 in New Buffalo Township which is currently, New Buffalo Township Fire Station 2.

The parcel for sale is parcel number 11-13-0017-0014-07-6.

Building can be viewed on the following dates and times:
June 2nd from 5:00-6:00 p.m.
June 7th from 3:00-4:00 p.m.

For more information, call Township Hall at 269-469-1011 or email Chief Flick at jflick@newbuffalotownship.org

The Township does not warrant any evidence of title nor unencumbered ownership and will not provide a warranty deed. All proposed bidders are urged to obtain title insurance or other evidence of title before submitting bids. Any evidence of title shall be submitted along with any bids.

Bid should include a proposed buy/sell agreement, the closing will be within 30 days after a bid is accepted, the Township may also select a backup bid if the accepted bid fails to close, and the successful bidder will have 20 days to conduct due diligence, and the successful bidder will be responsible for all closing costs and title insurance premiums.

New Buffalo Township reserves the right to accept any bid, reject any and all bids, to waive informalities and to make the award in any manner deemed in the best interest of New Buffalo Township.