



Walmart in Mountain View began controlling access to the store last Thursday, structuring the entry and exit to promote social distancing. Over the weekend, the store began metering entry and exit to prevent the number of customers from exceeding 20 percent of the store's capacity.

## County Judge recovering; says virus is serious

By Edie Sutterfield

Stone County Judge Stacey Avey reported that he was beginning to recover Monday but cautioned the public that the COVID-19 threat should be taken seriously.

"People say it's like the flu. Probably a light case may be like the flu."

His personal experience was considerably worse, however.

"It's kinda like having the flu on steroids, the flu times 12," he said.

Avey went into quar-

antine Sunday, March 22, after discovering that a county employee he had recently met with had tested positive.

Avey began having symptoms Tuesday, March 24, and received a positive test result a few days later. He said the first week was relatively mild, with body aches, loss of energy, headaches, and some fever. He took a turn for the worse the second week, however, experiencing the telltale cough and shortness of breath that are characteristic of COVID-19, along with fever that was difficult to control.

He said Monday that he had not experienced fever since Friday, after having it for eight days. However, he was still having trouble breathing and had not recovered his energy.

Avey said he had not been hospitalized but had been in daily contact with his doctor by phone. He is also receiving regular calls from the Department of Health, which tracks his symptoms and will eventually declare him recovered after he has been symptom-free for a few days.

His family members were tested last week but still had not received results as of Monday.

Avey does not expect to return to work this week and will miss the regularly scheduled quorum court meeting that is still planned for Thursday. The court has to act on ordinances related to the sale of bonds for the jail project.

Meanwhile, the county employee who initially got sick returned to work Monday.

"He got pretty sick, but he didn't get as bad as I did. It didn't get to his lungs," Avey said.

Avey said it is unclear why some people become sicker with the virus than others. He does not have any of the underlying conditions associated with severe cases, such as diabetes, blood pressure or heart disease, and he takes no prescription medicines.

"That's the reason I wasn't really worried about it," he said.

"For the ones that think it's just a light case of the flu, from my personal experience you do not want to get a case of this. It's rougher than any kind of flu we've had going through."

Avey said he has received many messages and calls, and he especially appreciates all the thoughts and prayers from the community.

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As of press time, the Arkansas Department of Health listed the number of cases for Stone County at five.

## Board approves school calendar

### Schedule for 2020-21 contingent on directives from state

By Edie Sutterfield

While navigation of the ongoing school shutdown dominated the discussion of the school board at its regular meeting March 30, officials are also looking to the future and making necessary preparations for a hopeful return to normalcy next fall.

The board approved a 2020-21 school calendar proposed by Supt. Brent Howard, including several additional holidays in the schedule. (Arkansas Department of Education announced Monday that schools will not resume onsite classes this spring, so plans for next year's schedule could be affected.)

According to the schedule approved by the board, the first day of class is set for Aug. 13, with the first holiday on Labor Day Monday, Sept. 7.

Parent/teacher conferences are set for two Thursdays, Oct. 15 and March 11, and school will be closed on the Fridays following the conferences.

School will also be dismissed for the entire week of Thanksgiving Nov. 23-27 and two weeks for Christmas and New Year's, Dec. 21-Jan. 1.

In the spring semester, school will close for Martin Luther King Day on Jan. 18, Presidents Day on Feb. 15, and Good Friday on April 2, which are all new additions.

The last day of school will be May 25.

Howard said the purpose of the additional days off is to boost staff morale, as well as combatting absenteeism among teachers. For example, the days after conferences and the first part of Thanksgiving week have high rates of absenteeism, he said.

Also during the meeting, the board discussed

logistics of providing at-home learning materials for students over the next few weeks, as well as meals.

Several different avenues were considered, including handing out physical packets to everyone, mailing the packets, providing assignments online, and lending electronic devices to students who don't have them at home. Collection and grading of materials is also a concern.

Ultimately, administrators chose to take a mixed approach to the alternative methods of instruction (AMI) assignments. The assignments were provided online last week, and students who are unable to complete them at home in that format were asked to contact the school for a printed AMI packet.

Howard said it was decided that providing as much digital information as possible would be best to protect public health.

"My main focus right now is I want all my teachers and kids in the county to be healthy — safe and healthy," Howard said.

Schools are also continuing to provide meals to students but have limited the distribution schedule to one day per week, in order to minimize contact.

On the first day of the new schedule, March 30, Howard reported that they had given out 5,300 meals at seven locations throughout the county. This includes both breakfasts and lunches for a five-day period. The meals were gone in about 45 minutes, he said, and the numbers available would be increased this week because people were still coming to get them.

Asst. Supt. Mark Rush explained that the meals are all shelf-stable items such as cereal, breakfast

bars, packaged peanut butter sandwiches, etc. Because they are not cold, they are unable to include milk, he said.

He noted that all of the food meets the nutritional requirement followed by the school cafeterias.

In other business, the board took the following action:

- extended one-year contracts to certified staff and hired Kelly Warren for middle school math at Mountain View and Aliza Jones for the facilities management plan contract service. They also accepted the resignation of MVHS special ed teacher Erica Johnson, elementary janitor Rita Riege, Rural

Special bus driver Marty Berry, and MVHS lunchroom worker Bonnie Rush.

- accepted a bid of \$14,450 from Pro Pavers of Drasco to repair High School Drive, which has several potholes. Rush said this is a reputable small company that he has some experience with, and their bid was less than half of that submitted by Atlas Asphalt, a larger company that did another paving project at the school last year. It was agreed that now would be an optimum time for the project, while school is out.

- approved entering a contract with Today's Power, a solar energy

company in Little Rock, for an arrangement that will save the school money in the form of rebates on its payments to Entergy. Howard said there is no cost or liability for the school, and the savings is estimated at \$2.7 million over 25 years. He has been studying solar proposals for several months.

- approved two student transfers from Timbo to Rural Special. Howard also reported that enrollment had increased slightly from the same time last year. Despite the current school closure, one new student enrolled in the district March 30, bringing the total number of students to 1,650.

## Teachers share challenges

Everyone faces their own challenges during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. This week, local teachers share their experiences as they cope with being suddenly shut out of their classrooms while still working to provide guidance and support for students and families throughout the county. They have created Alternative Method of Instruction packets to cover far more "AMI days" than ever anticipated.

The *Leader* asked veteran educator Shelley Smith of Rural Special to provide an overview of the situation. She has taught in Stone County for 15 of her total 32 years and she plans to retire this year. She currently teaches art, Spanish and journalism.

Accompanying her segment are messages from others who chose to respond individually.

By Shelley Smith

Sometimes on Friday afternoons I'd pause for



Shelley Smith's workspace is like many others, a dinnette table turned desk.

a moment as I left my classroom and look back, wondering what it would be like if I were not able to return the next week. Would I feel that I had done everything I could the past week to teach what I am supposed to? Did I connect with my students? Did I treat everyone fairly and with kindness? Was I too busy to notice an opportunity to help someone when

they needed me?

I'd gaze at the weird, beautiful, and funny art projects sitting out to dry over the weekend and wonder what it would be like if, in some kind of science fiction movie future, someone excavated my room and found them all. Would they be able to piece it together and understand

See *Teachers*, page 3B