

**THURSDAY,
March 19, 2020**
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**WHAT YOU
NEED TO KNOW**

**Freeman Courier
office closed this week**

The *Courier* newspaper office is closed to the public through at least this week. A number of reasons went into the decision:

1. As a precaution, office Manager Linda Von Eye has remained self-quarantined at her home after returning from a cruise to the Caribbean.

2. Three staff members have school-aged children and younger at home, and with classes suspended, priority needs to be given to families.

3. All the information coming out suggests to err on the side of caution.

Staff may still be reached by emailing courier@gwtc.net, scpi.adv@gwtc.net or tabitha@thefreemancourier.com. You may also call or text 605-351-6097. Copies of the *Area Wide Connection* are available inside the front door.

**The uncertainty of the
community calendar**

With the coronavirus impacting schedules and activities indefinitely, it's impossible to know what will be happening when – if at all. That has altered what the *Courier* is including on the *Around Our Towns* pages and on our Resources page, which includes upcoming events in both Freeman and Menno. As you'll see, we're publishing primarily what has already taken place, as well as the Senior Citizen Center activities, which are being held in Freeman as planned. As for the community calendar, you'll find an abbreviated version on page 5A including only the information we are certain of. This will be updated online and in print in the weeks to come when we know more.

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\$1.25

4 MUST-READS THIS WEEK

1. Note the city of Freeman's new snow ordinance Page 2A
2. News from our schools and their students Pages 6-7A
2. The Herald's comment about Sen. Pettigrew in 1900 Page 9A
4. Carol Eisenbeis' poignant, heartfelt column Pages 11A

THE COURIER

Serving the larger Freeman & Menno, South Dakota communities

COVID-19

and its impact here

Schmeckfest is postponed, schools are closed and officials from Freeman Regional Health Services are watching closely. Like everywhere around the world, the coronavirus is hitting home.

JEREMY WALTNER PUBLISHER

It has taken 61 years, but something has finally come along powerful enough to derail Schmeckfest as planned: the coronavirus.

Freeman Academy officials announced late last week that they were postponing the popular festival amidst growing concerns about the spread of the COVID-19 illness; new dates have not been determined.

Schmeckfest was scheduled to start this Friday, March 20 and continue March 21, 27 and 28. In an eerie coincidence, the school's announcement came on Friday the 13th of March; the very first Schmeckfest in 1959 was held Friday, March 13.

Although weather has had an impact a number of times over the years, never before has even a day of activities been canceled.

The statement issued by the Schmeckfest Auxiliary Executive Board, Freeman Academy Board of Directors and its administration last Friday said new dates would be announced once the longer-term impact of COVID-19 become clearer. Tickets already purchased for both the meal and the production of "Matilda the Musical" will be transferable to the new dates.

"This has been a difficult decision," the statement read. "However, we cannot risk the safety of our students, faculty, volunteers, community and Schmeckfest visitors. We also feel a personal responsibility to help stop the spread of this contagious virus. We have been strongly encouraged to take preventative measures, not just for ourselves, but for all those who enter our campus, and especially those with weakened immune systems."

Concerns that coronavirus would have an impact on Schmeckfest grew the middle part of last week, as the spread of the worldwide pandemic became a hard reality in South Dakota and across the United States. The first cases in South Dakota — five, including the death of a Pennington County man in his 60s — were reported Tuesday, March 10.

Worry went from zero to 60 in the days that followed; the NBA announced Wednesday night that it was canceling the rest of its season and the majority of the sports world followed suit with action the following day, including the cancellation of the NCAA men's and women's basketball tournaments. That unprecedented development revealed just how serious the COVID-19 threat had become.

Sioux Falls declared a state of emergency on Thursday and on Friday South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem asked that all schools be closed the week of March 16-20. Schools across the



This sign at the corner of Sixth Street and Cherry says it all. School and Schmeckfest officials made the decision last Friday morning to postpone the festival for the first time in its 61-year history.

PHOTO BY JEREMY WALTNER

Some Schmeckfest food sales still on; exhibit at HHM&A open

While Schmeckfest is postponed indefinitely, organizers are still planning to make some food items available for purchase. That includes Schmeckfest sausage, bierocks and popular Country Kitchen items like cheese pockets, kuchen, noodles, peppernuts and poppy seed rolls.

These items from local bakers will be available in the Freeman Academy Maintenance Building from 1 to 6 p.m. March 20, 21, 27 and 28. Online preorders may also be placed at www.schmeckfest.com.

Anyone with food products that were made for the Schmeckfest Country Kitchen is encouraged to call Amy Waltner at 648-3772 or Kathy Kleinsasser at 925-7952 to

offer their items and schedule a time for delivery.

In addition to those food sales, the traveling exhibit from the Kauffman Museum at Bethel College scheduled to be here through April 26 — *Voices of Conscience: Peace Witness in the Great War* — is set up for viewing at the Bethel Church at Heritage Hall Museum and Archives.

While the entire Heritage Hall campus is closed, those who would like to see the exhibit and museum by appointment may call the museum at 925-7545.

The program scheduled for March 29 that was to be part of the exhibit, featuring Dora Maendel and Dr. Duane Stolzhus, has been canceled.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3A: COVID-19