

CORTE MADERA

SHOP SHUTDOWN



SHERRY LAVARS — MARIN INDEPENDENT JOURNAL

The Village at Corte Madera shopping center is empty and quiet amid the Marin County shelter in place order in Corte Madera on Wednesday. The open-air center which includes Macy's, Williams-Sonoma, Apple Store and more is generally bustling.

TRAVIS BASE

Fairfax couple await quarantine release

By Matthew Pera
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Hunkered down in a hotel room at Travis Air Force Base, where they've been quarantined along with hundreds of others who were exposed to the coronavirus aboard the Grand Princess cruise ship, Mario Batz and Gerry Drake are counting down the days until they're allowed to return home to Fairfax.

It's been almost a month since the day the couple said goodbye to their 11-year-old golden Labrador retriever, left Fairfax and boarded the cruise ship in San Francisco. Now, they're living in what Batz calls "a nightmare."

At the quarantine site, he said, communication from officials has been scarce. So are resources like pillows, blankets and toilet paper. And, for much of the time, the isolated cruise ship passengers have been intermingling, potentially

spreading the virus among them.

"We're all standing in line 6 inches from each other, 200 people deep, waiting for food, water, coffee, towels, toilet paper," he said. "And there's been people pulled out of here, this supposedly safe quarantine spot, with coronavirus."

It was supposed to be a 10-day cruise to Hawaii and Mexico. Batz took time off from his job managing a San Rafael moving company, and Drake took a vacation from her

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PEACOCK GAP

Golfers booted from course in virus lockdown

By Lorenzo Morotti
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About 100 golfers at Peacock Gap Golf Course in San Rafael were told by police to pack up their clubs and go home on Thursday.

The golf course was shut down for violating the "shelter in place" order that was issued throughout the region to control the spread of the coronavirus, San Rafael police Lt. Dan Fink said.

The order mandates that non-essential businesses close until April 7, but the golf course had been operating all week — giving people a place to escape seclusion and enjoy the outdoors.

"It was a gorgeous day, a beautiful day," said Spencer Michels, 82, a San Anselmo resident. "And for two to three hours it was wonderful. We were away from all the mess, playing golf. No one was around and then the police came and screwed it up."

Michels said he arrived at the golf course at 9 a.m. with friends. He said they did not use golf carts and stayed 6 feet away from one another, but there were a lot of people at the driving range and that may have been the problem.

Even though the confinement order approves outdoor activity, Dr. Matt Willis, Marin County public health officer, said the county ordered the closure because the golf course is a business that requires employees, employees and customers to be near

each other to stay open.

"The intent of order is to limit travel within the community and interactions between individuals in order to limit the total number of social encounters that can lead to transmission of COVID-19, and that strategy is to slow the spread of this epidemic," Willis said. "So when we make a decision on what is essential and what isn't essential we communicate with other counties who also have this this order — and the business of a golf course is non-essential and there is consensus on that."

The owners of the golf course could not be reached, but Fink said they were cooperative and misunderstood the intent of the shelter order.

"People want to voluntarily comply," Fink said. "People are confused on what this order means and what they can and can't do. People are saying outdoor activity fine as long as social distancing is happening. So there was a little confusion and some learning as we continue to get direction from the county."

Earlier this week, the golf course published a notice that it would remain open with limited functions despite the shelter in place order.

Any non-essential business violating the order will be issued a warning, and further violations are considered a misdemeanor and a citation will be issued, Fink said.

Another golf course, Indian Valley Golf in Novato, is also

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Payments

FROM PAGE 1

shutdown that's hurtling the country toward a likely recession.

"We need to take bold and swift action as soon as possible," McConnell, announcing his plan on the Senate floor.

It's an opening salvo in fast-track talks with Democrats as President Donald Trump urges Congress to "go big" to respond as Americans reel from the crisis.

Under the GOP leader's plan, the aid would be phased out at income thresholds of \$75,000 for individuals and \$150,000 per couple. Additionally, there would be \$500 payments for each child.

McConnell's proposal aligns with the Trump administration's push to swiftly send a first round of checks to American households for immediate needs.

Additionally, the McConnell plan would provide \$300 billion in loans to small businesses, including loans that would eventually be forgiven for employers who use them to meet payroll expenses.

Keeping paychecks flowing for idled workers as jobless claims skyrocket is a top priority for both Republican and Democratic plans emerging from Congress. But how best to send direct payments to Americans — as one-time stipends, ongoing payroll support or unemployment checks — is a crucial debate.

Democrats have their own proposals for ushering aid to Americans, and even McConnell's GOP senators panned



ERIN SCHAFF — THE NEW YORK TIMES

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell walks to the Senate floor on Thursday. The Trump administration is proposing two waves of checks to individuals and another \$300 billion for small businesses as part of its economic response to the coronavirus pandemic.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin's idea of direct checks of \$3,000 for a family of four — preferring instead to use the federal dollars to keep workers who are asked to stay home on the business payrolls.

"What I want is income, not one check," said Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., summing up the views of some exiting a long, private meeting of GOP senators on Capitol Hill.

Trump administration officials, including Mnuchin and economic adviser Larry Kudlow, are expected to return to Capitol Hill on Friday to launch bipartisan negotiations with Senate Democrats.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, on a conference call with more than 220 House Democrats, urged them to "think big," according to people on the call granted anonymity to discuss it.

Pelosi reminded them after her recent talk with Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell that interest

rates are low. The outlay should be considered an investment, Pelosi told them.

Democrats compiling their own priorities in the House and Senate suggest other ways to keep paychecks flowing in what Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer called "employment insurance" — which he characterized as "unemployment insurance on steroids."

Schumer said utilizing the existing unemployment insurance system run by the states would be a "quick and easy" way to distribute money to the newly jobless.

"People desperately need it," Schumer said.

The swift-moving effort in an all-but-shuttered Capitol came as the first two lawmakers tested positive for the COVID-19 virus, others are self-isolating and the usually tradition-bound Congress faced calls to ease rules and allow remote voting.

To shore up industry, McConnell's plan would provide

\$208 billion in loans and loan guarantees to distressed sectors of the economy, including \$50 billion for commercial airlines and \$8 billion for air cargo carriers, and \$150 billion for other eligible businesses, but those loans would have to be paid back.

Unlike the airline bailout after the 9/11 attacks, there would not be direct cash grants to airlines, according to the bill.

The measure would also allow people to make penalty-free withdrawals of up to \$100,000 from their tax-deferred 401(k) retirement funds. It would also loosen tax rules on charitable giving.

The McConnell proposal would allow businesses to defer payment of the 6.2% employer payroll tax. Businesses would also receive more generous rules for business deductions of losses and interest costs.

At the same time, caring for the expected surge of sick Americans is a priority.

The McConnell proposal contains a raft of health care provisions — including permanent liability protection for the manufacturers of respirators and other desperately needed medical gear — but Democrats want more direct support to healthcare providers.

Democrats want to ramp up production of medical supplies and rapidly erect temporary field hospitals under new authorities Trump has invoked in the Defense Production Act.

"America needs a Marshall Plan for our health care system," said Schumer, citing the post-World War II program in which the U.S. financed rebuilding in Europe.

Lockdown

FROM PAGE 1

and medical care. Restaurant meals can still be delivered to homes.

The Democratic governor also announced that he is mobilizing 500 California National Guard troops to help with food distribution, but said they will be in place only for humanitarian reasons.

"I don't believe the people of California need to be told through law enforcement that it's appropriate just to home isolate," he said.

Pennsylvania earlier Thursday ordered all "non life-saving businesses" to close across the state.

Newsom earlier in the day asked the president to deploy a U.S. Navy medical ship to help the state expand its medical capacity and warned that more than half of California's residents could contract the new coronavirus.

Newsom asked President Donald Trump to send the USNS Mercy Hospital Ship to the port of Los Angeles for use through Sept. 1, in a letter dated Wednesday. California has disproportionately aided people returning to the U.S. from foreign countries and needs the ship to help "decompress" its health care delivery system as infection rates climb, Newsom wrote. The ship is

based in San Diego.

He said infection rates are doubling every four days in some parts of the state and issued the dire prediction that 56% of California's population could contract the virus over the next eight weeks.

His spokesman later confirmed that number does not take into account aggressive mitigation efforts underway across the state. Many large counties had already been issuing shelter-in-place orders aimed at keeping Californians confined to their homes and Newsom had directed the closure of bars, gyms and other gathering spaces statewide.

"This projection shows why it's so critical that Californians take action to slow the spread of the disease — and those mitigation efforts aren't taken into account in this projection," spokesman Nathan Click said in an emailed statement.

Newsom's letter to Trump said 25.5 million people could be infected. But the state's population is estimated to be just shy of 40 million, meaning 56% of the population would be closer to 22.4 million people. The governor's office did not respond to questions about his calculation or offer a prediction that considers efforts to stop the spread of the infection.

"If we meet this moment we can truly bend the curve to reduce the need to surge,

to reduce the need to have to go out and cobble all those assets together," Newsom said in his evening news conference streamed live on social media.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. It can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia, for some people, especially older adults and those with existing health problems. Most people recover — those with mild illness in about two weeks, while those with more severe illness may take three to six weeks, according to the World Health Organization.

"I can assure you home isolation is not my preferred choice, I know it's not yours, but it's a necessary one," Newsom said. "This is not a permanent state, this is a moment in time."

"You can still take your kids outside, practicing common sense and social distancing. You can still walk your dog," he said. "If we are to be criticized at this moment, let us be criticized for taking this moment seriously."

He announced that California had purchased the Seton Medical Center in Daly City. The 357-bed hospital was the city's largest employer with about 1,500 workers, but the hospital's owners filed for bankruptcy in August 2018.

"Even after our current public health crisis passes, it

would have been imperative for this facility remain open because 27,000 patients, mostly elderly and low-income, are served there," Democratic state Assemblyman Phil Ting said in a statement.

In a separate letter, Newsom on Thursday asked U.S. House and Senate leaders for \$1 billion to support surge planning for state and local health systems. He said that money would be needed to do things like set up state-run and mobile hospitals, housing options to help people socially distance and testing and treatment for people without health insurance.

He also asked for assistance so the state can extend unemployment benefits beyond the usual 26-week limit, expand food assistance programs, resources for the homeless and tribal communities and boost childcare programs. He further asked for assistance for schools, aid to local and state budgets and transportation relief.

"While California has prudently built a sizable Rainy Day Fund over the past ten years, the economic effects of this emergency are certain to mean that the state and its 58 counties will struggle to maintain essential programs and services," he wrote.

It warned many California households "may fall into poverty" without a "substantial economic intervention."

Release

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job managing mortgages at a bank.

The trip was a celebration of Batz's 50th birthday, which falls on Valentine's Day. The ship set off from San Francisco on Feb. 21, and "the beginning was great," Batz said. They plunged into the swimming pool on the top deck of the ship, snorkeled over Hawaiian coral reefs and rode dune buggies through mud.

But as the ship began to head east, toward its final stop in Ensenada, Mexico, things took a turn for the worse.

Over the loudspeaker, the captain announced that a man who had been on the prior Grand Princess voyage had tested positive for the coronavirus back home in Placer County. The Mexico leg of the trip was canceled.

"As soon as you find out that someone on the cruise directly before you came down with coronavirus, you start to wonder which railings he's touched or which bars he's been in," Batz said. "You don't know. So you would think that, on the side

of caution, they would send everybody to their cabin immediately."

But that day, given little direction from cruise ship managers, the passengers carried on as usual, eating in the ship's dining rooms and cafes, playing the slot machines and swinging putters at the nine-hole miniature golf course.

The following day, the passengers were ordered to stay in their rooms, and that was the beginning of a long saga that included circling off the California coast, disembarking in Oakland and, for some, riding a crowded bus to the air force base in Fairfield.

Batz and Drake were tested for the coronavirus on Monday, a week after they arrived at Travis. That was the first time they were offered testing, Batz said.

Despite reassurances from federal officials that all passengers who had been on the Grand Princess would be tested, many were not.

"We will be testing everyone on the ship," Vice President Mike Pence said three days before the Grand Princess docked in Oakland, during a press conference in which he announced that 21 people on the vessel had al-

ready tested positive for the virus.

After more than 2,000 passengers disembarked and were dispatched to military bases throughout the U.S., they were told that there were not enough tests for everyone. Several days into the 14-day quarantine, passengers said their requests for testing were denied.

Then last week, passengers at Travis were given an information sheet with this message: "You are not required to be tested. It will be your choice."

Some declined testing, because they said they wanted to get out of quarantine as soon as possible.

Princess Cruises said in a statement that quarantine operations are under the direction of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The department's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The workers who swabbed Batz and Drake told the couple to expect their results back on Saturday. Batz hopes that by Tuesday, when the 14-day quarantine period is over and they are allowed to return home, they will have

reassurance that they've not been infected. Both of them feel healthy.

"But the virus is here in quarantine," Batz said. "Gerry and I are safe because we're bunkering down, but there's people out there who could have it."

After they were tested, the couple began to take extra precautions to ensure they don't contract the virus before they leave. They no longer leave their room except to walk around in the hotel yard for fresh air. Workers deliver meals to their doorstep, which they accept with gloves. And they disinfect anything that's delivered to their room as soon as it crosses the threshold.

They plan to continue isolating themselves at home in Fairfax so they don't inadvertently spread the virus in Marin. But for now, they're focused on getting there.

"We turned this place into a sterile bunker, and we're just hunkering down, waiting for our time to come," Batz said. Marin County health officials said they did not know how many Marin residents were on the ship.

The New York Times contributed to this report.

In your town

THE COUNTY

Updated information on virus restrictions

A current list of Marin businesses, government offices and public services that are operating during the coronavirus restrictions is available at bayarene.ws/2Ugbvpi. Updates can be emailed to localnews@marinij.com or calendar@marinij.com.

Marin is among the Northern California counties that have announced shelter-in-place restrictions with some exceptions, including grocery shopping, medical visits, caring for family members and exercising outdoors. The order is in effect through April 7.

THE COUNTY

Councils declare emergency status

Municipal officials across Marin declared local emergencies this week in response to the coronavirus outbreak.

Novato, San Rafael, Fairfax, Corte Madera, Larkspur, Tiburon, Belvedere, Mill Valley and Sausalito have approved proclamations, and the San Anselmo and Ross town councils were poised to do so at special meetings Thursday.

The Marin County Board of Supervisors declared a local emergency for the unincorporated communities on March 3.

The proclamation allows each jurisdiction to accelerate emergency planning and staffing, and qualifies each jurisdiction for future reimbursement by the state for related accrued costs.

MILL VALLEY

City forms task force to bolster businesses

City officials will be

appointing an ad-hoc committee to focus on supporting business through and after the coronavirus shelter-in-place order.

The City Council directed the city manager on Monday to appoint a "business support task force" made up of members from the city's business community, the chamber of commerce, city staff and council.

The committee is tasked with finding ways to offset economic impacts and to find relief for business owners affected by the outbreak.

SAN RAFAEL

School district offers free food assistance

San Rafael City Schools is distributing free meals to all children under the age of 18 in the district Monday through Friday.

The meals, which include lunch plus breakfast for the following day, will be distributed from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at Bahia Vista Elementary School at 125 Bahia Way.

The school district is also planning food pantries for district families every Friday during the coronavirus "shelter in place" order.

The pantries will be open from 11 a.m. to noon at Bahia Vista, Laurel Dell, Short and Sun Valley schools, and from noon to 1 p.m. at San Pedro, Coleman, Venetia Valley and Glenwood schools.

District officials ask that families attend the pantry that corresponds with the elementary school their child attends or attended. The district encourages families to bring reusable bags.

Golf

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closing after being semi-open this week, said Jeff McAndrew general manager.

The course is in talks with the county and is waiting for a decision, McAndrew said.

"We are talking to the county and are not accepting tee times," he said. "At this time we don't know what's going to happen."

Public golf courses in Marin that are also closed are Mill Valley Golf Course and McInnis Golf Course in San Rafael.

Another business that was reported to be violating the order is the Marin Firearms store in Novato, police Deputy Chief Jim Correa said. The proprietor was not cited.

Correa said citations are a last resort and the main priority is to mitigate the risk of infection for people in the community.

"We are trying to educate business owners on what the order means and also trying to get them to be in compliance," he said.

The owner of the store could not be reached.

Willis said gun stores, like golf courses, are considered non-essential in the virus containment order. However, there are contingencies for non-essential businesses that allow them to keep functioning.

"If they can find a way to observe the intent of the order, which is to limit gatherings of employees or customers, then we are not intending to adjudicate every single situation that seems like a reasonable strategy," Willis said.



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