

COVID-19 response

BPNN closing to the public, changing pantry model

Meals may resume in April, food distribution to become drive-up only

NEAL PATTEN
Unified Newspaper Group

Badger Prairie Needs Network is now closed to the public, and its food pantry is working on developing food-pick up as a response to COVID-19's spread.

After a decision last week to suspend the twice monthly free community meals through April, BPNN updated its COVID-19 response procedures Monday, March 16, to include closing down the food pantry to patrons.

It will transition to a drive-up only model beginning Thursday.

March 19.

Pre-packaged boxes of food including dry goods, frozen meat and fresh vegetables will be delivered by volunteers who are not part of a high-risk population for COVID-19 to those in need of emergency assistance directly to their vehicles outside of BPNN beginning March 19.

In an announcement sent March 11, BPNN canceled its twice-monthly free community meals to protect against exposure to COVID-19 and had initially planned to keep the pantry open during the time.

It also canceled the Chop Chop cooking club for kids and Prairie Kitchen cooking club until further notice.

The cancellation of the community meal is through an undetermined date in April, but that timeline could be extended, the announcement states.

Staff at BPNN will re-evaluate the situation in April, and make further decisions at that time, the release states.

"After talking with meal staff, program leaders and board members, we made the determination that the most responsible thing we can do to protect our community is to close down the meal for a few weeks and then reassess," Marcia Kasieta, BPNN's executive director, wrote in the release. "There are a lot of concerns with bringing the populations we serve into crowded spaces."

The meals typically take place every month on the first and third Saturday. Kasieta said in the release around 130 to 150 people attend the regular Saturday meal and several dozen more come to shop in the food pantry.

With limited building space, it is

not possible to create social distancing between guests, the food pantry and community meal website stated, adding that visitors to BPNN are especially vulnerable to the coronavirus.

"Meal guests are mostly seniors, and it gets very crowded," Kasieta said. "We do not want to put anyone at risk — especially since many of our regular diners have become good friends."

BPNN is developing plans with its food donors to continue pantry operations to ensure emergency food assistance remains available to the 1,200 individuals who rely on nutritional assistance from BPNN each month, the announcement states.

"Thousands of local households depend on us for food assistance, and we are 100% committed to fulfilling our mission to end hunger locally,"

Kasieta said. "We are planning for emergency operations that both get food to those who need it and protect the health of the community."

In an email Kasieta sent Verona city officials Thursday, March 12, she noted that as employers, schools, restaurants, caterers and event planners in the community begin to make plans to close down business or cancel events, BPNN would work with them to reduce food waste. For any events that are downsized or cancelled, BPNN can pick up unneeded or unused food to repackaging for the pantry.

For information about how to donate, contact Kasieta by emailing mk@bpnn.org or by calling 608-347-1571.

Neal Patten, community reporter, can be contacted at neal.patten@wcinet.com.

Verona Area School District 317 years of experience set to retire

2020 VASD teacher retirements		
Staff member	School	Years with district
Heidi Becker	SO	19
Gale Chartier	SP	27
Richard Dow	HS	32
Ann Fredrickson	SO	29
Kathleen Gee-Bennett	SP	25
JoBeth Kroetz	SC	24
Stephen Lewis	HS	27
Patrice Lynam	HS	25
Jean Marty	SO	33
Michael Ray	HS	31
Susan Reddan	BR	25
Dave Richardson	HS	20

12 teachers, between 19-33 years in the district, set to retire

KIMBERLY WETHAL
Unified Newspaper Group

The Verona Area School District will say goodbye to 317 years of certified teaching staff at the end of the school year.

That's higher than last year, where the district lost 216 years of collective experience. That doesn't include three members of the administrative team — two site principals and the business manager.

Country View Elementary will give a farewell to principal Michelle Nummendor, as will Savanna Oaks to its principal, Sandy Eskrich. District business manager Chris Murphy will retire — for the second time — at the end of the year.

The school board approved the 12 staff members for retirement at its Monday, March 16, meeting, as all board members attended via phone conference due to concerns over spreading COVID-19. The retirements continue the recent trend of hundreds of years of experience leaving. In the prior four years, each round of

retirements topped 200 years, with eight teachers with 216 years of experience leaving in 2019, and 217 years leaving in 2018.

For a second year in a row, the high school was hit hardest with the retirements, with a combined 135 years of experience set to retire. Those educators include Richard Dow (32 years), Stephen Lewis (27), Patrice Lynam (25), Michael Ray (31) and Dave Richardson (20).

Savanna Oaks will also be significantly impacted by retirements. In addition to Eskrich, it will be losing three staff members, including Heidi Becker (19), Ann Fredrickson (29) and Jean Marty (33).

Other retiring staff include Stoner Prairie's Gale Chartier (27) and Kathleen Gee-Bennett (25), Sugar Creek's Jobeth Kroetz (24) and Badger Ridge's Susan Reddan (25).

COVID-19 response

The shows will not go on

VACT canceling all four youth shows in April

NEAL PATTEN
Unified Newspaper Group

Verona Area Community Theater has canceled its four April shows in response to COVID-19.

Performances of "Pajama Party," "Seussical Kids" and "Getting to Know: Footloose," were all scheduled for Thursday, April 2, through Saturday, April 4, at Verona High School's Performing Arts Center, 300 Richard St.

"Chicago: High School Edition," was scheduled for Thursday, April 16, through Saturday, April 18, also at the PAC.

With the school district closing down all buildings and services through Monday, April 6, and a ban on gatherings of 50 or more people put into effect by Governor Tony Evers, VACT was left with no option but to cancel the shows.

Individuals who had pre-purchased tickets to any of the four shows can get a refund. They may also donate the cost



Photo by Neal Patten

The reindeer Sven, played by Reese Roswold, and his companion Kristoff, played by Heath Davis, shared a duet during a November 2019 performance of "Frozen Jr."

of the ticket to VACT to help it recoup production costs or receive a credit for a future VACT show.

Further details about how pre-purchased tickets will be handled are available at vact.org/cancelled-youth-productions.

VACT founder Dee Baldock told the Press on Thursday, March 12, she hoped to find some way for the kids to "finish their project" and wanted to come up with "some sort of completion for them."

The sets have already been created and the costumes are made.

Ideas included livestreaming a performance of the shows to Facebook or making a recording available online.

"Seussical Kids" and "Pajama Party" each had two casts, so the shows would need to be live-streamed or recorded twice.

However, with Governor Tony Evers banning assemblies of 50 or more people beginning Monday, March 16, Baldock said that now prohibits gathering the cast and crew together. The cast and crew for all the shows are too large for the new guidelines, putting plans for streaming or recording on hold as of Tuesday, March 17.

The streaming or recording would have taken place at VACT's theater, 103 Lincoln St.

Rehearsals for "The Music Man Sr.," a show with actors all ages 55 and older, have been suspended for now. However, the May 15-17 performances remain scheduled at this time.

Neal Patten, community reporter, can be contacted at neal.patten@wcinet.com.

Schools in brief

No decision on superintendent firm

The school board didn't make a decision on a superintendent firm like it was scheduled to do so at its Monday, March 16, meeting.

None of the board members were physically present at the meeting, as they called in from home to decrease the spread of COVID-19. The only people physically present at the meeting was superintendent Dean Gorrrell, administrative assistant Tamera Stanley and two audience members.

The decision will be postponed to a later meeting.

Board approves pay for hourly workers amid COVID-19 closure

District hourly employees will be paid during the week leading up to Spring Break, regardless of whether

they're reporting to work or not because of COVID-19.

The board approved the changes to the handbook to allow district hourly employees to keep their pay status. Staff originally weren't

scheduled to be paid during Spring Break.

Stanley said the board will revisit the issue of continued pay at its Monday, April 6 meeting if school closures extend past that day.

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Businesses and Residents Of VAHS It truly takes a village! Please donate!

Please consider donating to the 2019-2020 VAHS Prom by 4/25/20!

All Money goes to Verona Area Prom and Post Prom.

To donate, go to:
classmunity.com/vasd/view-fundraiser.php?fundraiser_id=937

Or send donations to:
Verona Area High School, Attn: Shannon Kelly • 300 Richard St. Verona 53593