

SWFLAToday



Kristiana Sapkar, one of Rayna Overmyer's fifth grade students, finds a surprise message from her teacher Saturday morning. RAYNA OVERMYER

CORONAVIRUS

Families delighted by teacher's notes

Rayna Overmyer lets kids know she misses them

Thaddeus Mast
Naples Daily News
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

Some students are treating their time off school as a long spring break. Others are ready to return to the classroom after closures brought on by a global pandemic.

Collier County Public Schools' online learning program begins Monday as the district adheres to social distancing guidelines brought on by the novel coronavirus. But one Laurel Oak Elementary School teacher couldn't wait for the virtual classes and wanted to send a personal message to her students.

Fifth-grade teacher Rayna Overmyer spent the weekend driving to each of her students' homes and leaving a note. One of her students walked outside to see a chalk message on the sidewalk — "I'm thinking of you. I miss you! Hope to see you soon! Mrs. O."

"She was just so excited," said Daniela Sapkar, the parent of one of Overmyer's students. "She got really nostalgic, saying she just wants to go back to school."

Overmyer is one of those special teachers all students love, Sapkar said.

"(Overmyer) sort of connects with kids at a different level," Sapkar said. "She's that one teacher kids walk around and get to say, 'I have Mrs. O.'"

The 14-year veteran teacher spent more than five hours driving to 26 homes just to leave a quick message and let her students know she hasn't forgotten them.



Overmyer, here with her husband, Matt, and children, Alan, 12, and Kade, 8, spent hours writing the notes. RAYNA OVERMYER

"I'm just doing what I do — that's just me," Overmyer said. "I tried to be sneaky, but one of my students caught me. Seeing the smile on her face — that five hours was very worth it."

Overmyer, along with all the Collier school system teachers, spent the last week preparing to use

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Domestic violence up in Collier County amid isolation



Brent Batten
Columnist
Naples Daily News
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLA.

When making decisions to shut down parts of society to prevent the spread of coronavirus, the impact on the economy must be weighed against the public health risk of infection.

But those aren't the only factors in play.

Mental health experts say it's reasonable to expect the incidence of suicide to increase as the outbreak and attendant precautions spread.

A USA Today report noted, "Social distancing and quarantines may trigger those currently dealing with suicidal thoughts. And research shows the social and economic fallout from the pandemic may amplify the risk for some people well after the outbreak has ended."

And then there's domestic violence.

On Tuesday, Sheriff Kevin Rambosk told county commissioners his office had seen a 30% increase in the number of domestic violence calls received in the past week.

Specifically, on Sunday, after additional restrictions had taken hold, the Sheriff's Office received 20 domestic violence calls. The Sunday before, the number was 12. Over the past six months, an average Sunday sees about 15 domestic violence calls, according to sheriff's representative Karie Partington.

Maybe it was an anomaly. A statistical blip unrelated to the shelter in place recommendations

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Drought index creeping up as dry conditions persist

Chad Gillis
Fort Myers News-Press
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

There are basically two seasons in South Florida: the hot, humid summers when rains drop almost daily and then, well, now, when the landscape is turning crispy.

The current dry season started in October.

And all but one of the past seven months (December) has been drier than average, according to South Florida Water Management District records.

Lee and Collier counties, on average, have seen about half of the typical six inches of rain the region would see through March 24.

Is relief on the way?

The short answer is no, while the long-term answer is more complicated.

"Basically we're sitting under a big ridge of high pressure and you have sinking air that basically squashes any rain development," said Paxton Fell, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Miami, which covers the Naples and Collier County areas.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or NOAA, says in its 90-day outlook that Florida has an above-average chance of above-average temperatures between now and June.

That means the heat wave we've seen so far this year is likely to continue for the next two months.

"We're not getting any chances of rain at all but some models are in disagreement," Fell said. "But some models are in disagreement for early next week time frame. One (forecasting model) says there might be a low pressure system developing with a cold front, and that could bring some rain. But others (models) say the high pressure is going to stay around, so we're going with that right now."

The U.S. Drought Monitor shows virtually all of Florida as being abnormally dry, with drought conditions popping up in the Panhandle.

If there is a saving grace, NOAA has given the region an above-average chance of above-average rains between now and the beginning of the rainy season.

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Naples PD may issue fines if beach closure noncompliance continues

Jake Allen
Naples Daily News
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

Officers with the Naples Police Department may begin issuing fines and notices to appear in court to gain the public's compliance with beach closure orders.

The city closed the Naples Pier and beaches on March 18 in an effort to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. The closures will last through March 30, according to a news release.

Officers turned away more than 100 people who arrived at city beaches for sunset Tuesday evening, according to a press release from the Naples Police Department.

The Naples Police Department will educate those

who are on the beaches about the closures, but if non-compliance continues, it will be issuing notices to appear in court for violations of City Ordinance 26-1.

A violation of the city ordinance can lead to a fine of up to \$500 or imprisonment for a period of up to 60 days, according to the release.

Walking, sitting, swimming and watching the sunset are not allowed at the beaches under the closure order, according to the release.

"We are confident that we will receive compliance and want to stress our emphasis on educating the public regarding universal precautions and social distancing to gain compliance with the beach closure order and appreciate the public's cooperation during these trying times," the press release reads. "Community compliance is key to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Please help us all and stay home."

Batten

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and closure of restaurants, bars and other places of business.

The Naples Police Department didn't report a similar spike. So far, NPD has received just one domestic violence call in March, compared to four in February and three in January.

Marco Island police likewise saw no increase. "It appears that our numbers are down from last week. Additionally, last week's numbers are equal to last year's numbers and overall, the month is consistent with the monthly numbers from last year," Chief Tracy Frazzano wrote in an email.

The Lee County Sheriff's Office responded to 43 domestic violence calls in the last week of February, before the shutdowns and social isolation began and 29 the week ending March 24.

So, while the Collier sheriff's experience doesn't reflect a regional trend, it does suggest there may be a societal cost to hunkering down that goes beyond business' bottom lines.

Loss of income, forced togetherness and disrupted routines can lead to anxiety and worse in the home.

"This is what we anticipated," said Kaydee Tuff, spokeswoman for The Shelter for Abused Women and Children in Naples.

Oddly, the increase in calls to the Sheriff's Office doesn't correspond to an increase in calls for help to the shelter.

Linda Oberhaus, CEO of the shelter, said victims may believe they have no choice but to stay where they are.

With so many businesses and government agencies closed, there may be a perception the shelter is

closed as well. That's not the case, Oberhaus said. The crisis line, 239-775-1101, is staffed 24 hours a day.

The website, naplesshelter.org, makes it clear. "You do not have to stay in an unsafe situation," the home page message states.

"We're open for service," she said. "We're available to support them. Reach out to us for help."

Oberhaus speculates that victims that might otherwise have called the shelter waited until the situation escalated, then called the Sheriff's Office, leading to the spike in calls.

The shelter and the Sheriff's Office put out a joint statement Wednesday stressing that home isn't a safe place for everybody and that help is available.

"We don't want the Sheriff's Office to see another weekend like they had last weekend," Oberhaus said.

"We also understand that these are unique and stressful times for everyone, and we encourage those who are experiencing extreme anxiety or signs of depression to seek help through the David Lawrence Center or another provider. We will get through this together as a community," Partington wrote in an email.

"Families and/or roommates residing in the same dwelling that are having trouble getting along are encouraged to give each other space, seek other activities in the home, take a walk, etc." offered Lt. Anita Iriarte of the Lee County Sheriff's Office.

Or, as Rambosk told commissioners Tuesday, "What we've really got to do is just engage the community and tell everybody to relax. Just engage in something else. Pick up a book," he said.

That is more and more challenging with libraries closed and other things to engage in off limits. Those considerations need to be part of the shutdown calculus as well.

Connect with Brent Batten at brent.batten@naplesnews.com or via Facebook.

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