

By John Marek, Executive Director of the Anson Economic Development Partnership (AnsonEDP): On Tuesday, May 5 Governor Cooper laid out his plan for the first phase of reopening the North Carolina economy from the partial shutdown necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Beginning Friday, May 8 at 5:00 p.m. a new, less restrictive stay-at-home order went into effect. Under this order, businesses will no longer be classified as essential or nonessential, and most businesses are allowed to reopen under stringent social distancing and cleanliness requirements. The exception will be businesses where social distancing is difficult or impossible to achieve. These include gyms, movie theaters, hair and nail salons, and tattoo and massage parlors. Retail stores that were previously closed, such as booksellers and clothing shops, may open at 50% of capacity and must routinely disinfect their stores and screen employee health daily. Restaurants will still be limited to drive-thru, takeout, or delivery service under the new rules.

People are allowed to travel freely to and from any open business. Outdoor gatherings are allowed, but they must be of no more than ten people, and social distancing must be maintained. Worship services may also be held outdoors with proper social distancing. Businesses are still encouraged to allow employees to work from home wherever possible. Everyone is strongly encouraged to wear face coverings in public places.

What does this mean for Anson County? Although Anson County has reported relatively few cases of COVID-19 and no deaths, our location on one of the primary transportation corridors in the state continues to make us somewhat vulnerable when compared to other similarly rural counties.

We expected that most eligible businesses would reopen either this past weekend or at the beginning of this week. There is still some ambiguity about what operating at 50% of capacity means and how that will be monitored and enforced. For now, we suggest using half the number of people permitted by the fire code as a guide and using common sense when it comes to tracking this. The important thing is to maintain the six-foot buffer between customers and employees throughout the shopping experience.

It is important to remember that because businesses can reopen, that does not necessarily mean they will reopen. We suspect that some shops and offices operated by people in the high-risk category will remain closed, and some manufacturing and service businesses do not have sufficient demand based on the economy as a whole. Companies that are involved in the automotive, aerospace, or travel sectors, for instance, may not have enough business to justify reopening.

May is the time when Anson County's tourism-related businesses typically ramp up for beach season. Even with parks and beaches reopening and a loosening of travel restrictions, we are unlikely to see an average amount of through-traffic this summer. This will have a significant impact on our small businesses and our sales tax base.

What does this mean for AnsonEDP and REV Uptown? As a business organization deemed essential by the state, AnsonEDP was never compelled to close our offices. However, out of an abundance of caution and our unique co-location with other entities, we chose to close our offices and mandate that our staff work from home. We also shuttered our incubator and co-working space and arranged for our foodservice partner to provide carryout only during limited hours.

We now believe it is time for AnsonEDP to begin planning for the reopening of our offices and the REV Uptown facility, in compliance with the governor's directive. Beginning the week of May 11, AnsonEDP will move its offices to the incubator section of the facility, providing greater social distancing for the co-located tenants. Through Phase One, our offices will be open to the public on Wednesdays from 10:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. and by appointment. The staff will continue to work from home the other days of the week.

The conference room will be closed, but meetings of up to 10 can be arranged in the incubator area with prior approval and with proper social distancing.

The incubator and co-working spaces will remain closed, but we will be accepting new member applications in anticipation of reopening during Phase 2, which is likely to begin in June.

Scam Alert: Coronavirus Scams Don't Let Up

As COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus, continues to spread across North America, scammers continue to cash in. Don't fall victim to these three scams.

Phony Websites - With shortages of sanitizers, disinfectants, masks and paper products seen throughout the country since the COVID-19 virus first surfaced, the Better Business Bureau (BBB) warns that websites selling these, and other related products have also surfaced.

An investigation by BBB shows that most of these websites are newly created, within the last couple weeks or so. And, as quickly as they've surfaced, many have disappeared already. The perpetrators behind the websites keep their identity private, and often disband the sites soon after they've created them and have stolen your money.

BBB has been busy investigating several sites and complaints received since mid-March.

Facebook "Friends" - Plenty of (bored) people who are connected to the internet are using the downtime to catch up with friends on social media or randomly surfing the web. Unfortunately, so are scammers. They will take advantage of social networking sites, earning victims' trust by pretending to be someone they already know and send out a message or two with a great new cure for COVID-19, a fundraising request or perhaps a discount on the most sought after items such as toilet paper, face masks and sanitizers.

While scrolling through Facebook, a message pops up in Facebook Messenger. It's your friend, family member, or neighbor. At least it "looks"

like them because the profile picture matches. From here, the conversation goes one of two ways. In one version, your "friend" tells you about the latest cure, prevention tactic against the coronavirus or the most awesome deal they found on masks. All you have to do is select a link, share the good news or simply respond to the message. In some cases, perhaps you want to take part in the offer and are ready to pay a processing fee and tax.

BBB warns everyone before responding to such a request, check that the Facebook profile image is from who it says it is. Or, go the extra step and call, text, or email the friend to see if they really did send it to you.

Puppy Scams With a Covid Twist - BBB is receiving Scam Tracker (www.bbb.org/scamtracker) reports of potential pet owners being told they have to pay extra for a crate or insurance to have a pet shipped because of the coronavirus. In each of the cases reported, victims were also asked to provide an alternate payment, such as a gift card, or mobile banking option that was not part of the original transaction. These are red flags that the dealer is not legitimate, and they probably don't have the pet they are attempting to sell.

BBB previously conducted a study reviewing the scope of this problem, who is behind it, and the need for law enforcement consumer education to address the issue. You can read the full study at www.bbb.org.

Anson Crisis Ministry is Open, Distributing Free Food

Charlotte television stations have reported closures in that area, leading to confusion about Anson Crisis Ministry

The Anson Crisis Ministry, a food bank serving Anson County citizens, is operating with their regular hours. It is located at 117 North Rutherford Street in uptown Wadesboro.

• Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday, 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Hidden Secrets, the thrift store located across the street at 108 North Rutherford Street, is closed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Anson Crisis Ministry is ready to serve the people of Anson County, so they welcome you to come by. The telephone number is 704-694-2445.

Church News

* All events are subject to change because of the COVID-19 situation. You may want to seek confirmation of events.

MAY 31
100 Women in Hats Fundraiser at New Life Trinity Church, 2:30pm for Anson County Domestic Violence Coalition with Min Peggy Hubbard of West Rocky Ford Baptist Church in Wadesboro

JUNE 14
Family & Friends Day

At New Life Trinity Church, 2:30pm. Theme "Value Your Family & Friends"

ONGOING

Live on the Radio
Min Gregory Williams on WADE 1340AM every 1st & 3rd Saturday, 2pm

Bible Study
Every Wednesday at 6pm at Flakes Chapel MBC. Everyone is invited

Bible Study
Hour of Power at Ebenezer MBC Wednesdays at 7pm

Bible Class
Tuesday nights at Lakeside Holiness Church, 6:30-7:30pm, activities for children

Bible Study
At Parsons Grove MBC Tue at 6:30pm

Service at Anson Health & Rehab by Cedar Creek MBC every third Monday, 7-7:30pm

Noon Prayer
At Greater St. Mark COD, noon on Tuesdays

Community Prayer
Held on Anson High School campus each Sunday at 4pm

Community Prayer
1st Monday each month, 5:15pm at Hatcher Park in Lilesville, Square in Wadesboro, Polkton & Ansonville, Town Hall in Morven

Rides to Service
At East Rock Ford MBC. Call 704-695-2997

Fun for Seniors
Every 3rd Tuesday at Rock Hill MBC, 11am-1pm for 55 & older (exceptional adults too) are welcome

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to find out how...704-694-2480

Events

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MAY 13
Free Groceries

For families in need Mobile Food Pantry at Wingate Baptist Church, located at 109 East Elm St. in Wingate. Register 8-10am. Call for details 704-694-2445

MAY 19
Board of Education Regular Meeting

held virtually at 4:30pm. The public is invited to dial in, (224) 501-3412. The access code is 210-348-573

JUNE 5
Reveal Party

For the new season at the Ansonia Theatre. Invitation only for sponsors to have first dibs on seats, performance dates & the reveal of the 2020-21 season. To become a sponsor or for info, call 704-694-4950 or visit ansoniatheatre.com

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