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Local businesses weather residual effect of coronavirus fears

By Vera Kochan



Sign posted at Rheem CVS Photos Vera Kochan
customers to 50% capacity.

Rheem Theatre Assistant Manager Tiffanie Cone said weekends were still busy, but said "it could be that we've begun alcohol service and that's a disinfectant. Our \$5 Tuesdays are also busy." So far, movie theatres remain open, but social distancing is recommended.

CVS in the Rheem Shopping Center posted a handwritten sign on bright orange paper at their entrance door letting customers know what items are out of stock. Shipments of zinc, toilet paper, hand sanitizers, rubbing alcohol, masks, gloves, disinfectant wipes and sprays are not expected to arrive at the store until St. Patrick's Day. One clerk commented, "We're out of everything - it's crazy."

Rheem Starbucks Assistant Manager Jackie Bassett said mornings were as busy as usual the week of March 9, but now the store is limiting purchases to mobile and store pickup only.

Long lines greeted customers at Diablo Foods in Lafayette and other grocery chains over the weekend, with certain sections of the store's shelves nearly empty, especially bread, paper products and hand sanitizers, baby diapers and other childcare products, where items would normally be fully stocked.

Empty shelves had handwritten signs tacked to them, explaining how purchases are limited to between one or four per customer.

According to one store employee, even canned goods and nonperishable food items sold at a higher rate than normal.

Licensed Professional Counselor Bill Prasad breaks down the psychology behind bare store shelves. "This is very much at times a lot about copycat behavior. If you see someone in the store stocking up on toilet paper, you're thinking, 'OK. I should do that. That seems to be a good idea. I'll do it.'"

Prasad said that this type of behavior is also about control. "Stocking up on things may make you feel better, because you feel like you are taking some kind of action. For some people, just washing their hands, they feel like that's not enough, they have to do more." He advises people to just take what they need, because even though "stocking up on things may feel good, it could be harmful also because it could create shortages."

Moraga Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Kathe Nelson said, "Moraga retailers, restaurants and organizations have been quite transparent with the precautions they are taking to follow the guidelines presented both by the state of California and the CDC in regards to the COVID-19 virus. . It is important to continue supporting our local businesses. They remain operational to serve us, the community."

Amid nationwide fears, event cancellations, stock market plunges and lower than average patronage of retail businesses the week of March 9 Moraga's merchants were weathering the residual effects of the coronavirus with positive attitudes and a range from small to major dents in customer activity. What a difference a week makes.

Bartender/waiter for Pennini's Restaurant, Wyatt Miskel said, "It's been a little bit slower than usual during lunch, but nights are a lot slower. The bar is doing really well."

Now, following a decree by Gov. Gavin Newsom on March 15 all bars, wineries and brewpubs in California will be temporarily closed. Bill Chao, a manager at Chef Chao, is extremely disappointed with the loss in diners during recent weeks. "Business is very, very slow. Regulars are still coming in." Restaurants must now limit



Toilet paper and paper towels nearly gone at this grocery. Photos Vera Kochan

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