

States form regional supply chain for PPE

Seven in Northeast to develop policies for gear

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Northeast states will create a regional supply chain for personal protective equipment and medical supplies in an effort to save money and effectively distribute gear needed to reopen economies in the COVID-19 pandemic.

The seven states — Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island — will also develop policies for protective gear across their health care systems in the likelihood of a second wave of COVID-19.

“Our states should never be in a position where we are actively competing against each other for life-saving resources,” New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy said in a statement. “By working together across the region, we can obtain critical supplies as we begin the process to restart our economies, while also saving money for our taxpayers.”

The seven states, which have spent billions on medical equipment during the past few months, previously competed with one another for personal protective equipment, tests, ventilators and other critical supplies.

“It was totally inefficient and ineffective,” New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo said. “We just drove up prices by our own competition. It made no sense.”

Now, the states will increase their market power by purchasing supplies as

a consortium, Cuomo said. The consortium will make the states more competitive in international markets, helping them get equipment faster and at better prices, he added.

Murphy praised ongoing inter-state efforts during an appearance at Cuomo’s press conference Sunday afternoon.

“Regional cooperation matters so much,” Murphy said. “The notion of coordinating together as a region makes sense.”

The coalition will also allow the states to compare notes to avoid irresponsible vendors and identify suppliers in the region that can scale up to meet equipment needs in the coming months, Cuomo said.

“That’s something we all want to strive for,” Murphy said of finding local

suppliers.

The states banded together last month to form a regional council to coordinate a gradual easing of restrictions to contain the spread of the coronavirus that causes the COVID-19 disease.

Personal protective equipment, or PPE, is essential for health care workers and first responders if the states are going to reopen. In addition to identifying the region’s needs and developing policies for hospitals, the states will also identify suppliers in the area who can scale up production over the next three months to try limiting disruptions in the supply chain.

The states are also exploring “emerging technologies” to produce alternatives, such as 3D printers to manufacture certain types of PPE and medical products.

Red Bank

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their parking lots empty.

Clergy now have a virtual ministry, taking their services to the web to connect with the faithful. Amid the uncertainty, fear and home-bound solitude of the pandemic, there is some humanity too.

Approximately 170 of Red Bank’s 12,000 residents had tested positive for COVID-19 by the end of April. Among the local cases is the borough administrator, Ziad Andrew Shehady, who has since recovered.

“We have been unfortunately hit pretty badly by the number of individuals who have tested positive and further by the deaths that have been occasioned as a result of COVID-19 in our community,” Mayor Pasquale “Pat” Menna said.

“There is a sense of sadness. There is a sense of unity, although at a distance, with the family of the loved ones who have been lost.

“And there have been too many lives lost.”

7 a.m.

A few customers line up to enter Super Foodtown when it opens.

Inside, store workers start to fill the produce displays with items from today’s delivery. It’s pretty calm inside the store. Customers, wearing masks, drop food, dairy items and paper products into the carts. Today, the store has Bounty paper towels on the shelves.

Like other grocers, the stock of items in the store is dependent on the supply chain, under stress since the pandemic began to flare up in early March. Yesterday’s load of dairy products is coming today. Today’s will come Monday and there’s a special delivery coming on Sunday.

“In my 35 years I have been a grocer, this is categorically the toughest thing we have ever dealt with,” said Lou Scaduto Jr., president and chief executive officer of Food Circus Super Markets, which owns five Super Foodtown stores in Monmouth County.

“Whether it was Sandy or whether it was a regular hurricane or a snowstorm, you can almost come up with an end date. On something like this, there is no end date. You don’t know when things will correct themselves.”

Scaduto said the company’s store managers have to adjust on the fly. “These days are ever changing moment by moment,” he said. “There is no downtime.”

It’s a challenge for the store’s employees. “We try to anticipate our deliveries coming in, to the best of our abilities, from our wholesalers,” Scaduto said. “We have the crews in place to get the grocery, dairy and perishables up and out. Sometimes you are the mercy of the supply chain and when they can get there.”

Meanwhile, Foodtown must adapt to the requirements from state government. At the store’s two entrances, employees keep count of how many customers are in the store. Everyone must wear a mask.

“We try to work to the best ability to give them (customers) the best possible goods and prices while clearly maintaining the most safe environment for our customers, and foremost for our team members,” Scaduto said.

“They are heroes in their profession and what they do.”

8:30 a.m.

“Morning, Eleanor. Morning Patti.”
“Morning Mary Beth. You’re doing well?”

The Rev. John Mason Lock, rector at Trinity Church on West Front Street, is returning the greeting from his parishioners, those that tune in to the church’s Facebook page for his morning devotional, which runs Tuesday through Fridays.

On this Friday he’ll spend five or 10 minutes reading from the Bible, saying a

prayer, and offering a bit of encouragement.

“I’m delighted that you could tune in this morning together to hear a little bit of God’s word, to say some prayers and to lift up our community and our country in this difficult time,” Lock said.

“I hope that you’ve rested well and that you are feeling refreshed and new this morning. It’s going to be a good day.”

Afterward, Lock will put some final touches on his Sunday sermon and record the service so it can be played on Sunday. His kids will be a part of a Sunday School program that’s recorded as well.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a big change for Lock and other ministers in Red Bank. Services have moved online in the new paradigm of mandatory social distancing. A large, in-person religious service is no longer allowed.

For Lock, it’s become remote pastoral care with “tons of phone calls, video chats,” filling a critical need in uncertain times.

“By far and away, the biggest need out there is for human contact and friendship,” Lock said. “People are really feeling isolated and hungry for that.”

Noon

John Arcara, owner of Red Tank Brewing Company on Monmouth Street, is used to cleaning.

“With breweries, it’s 95% cleaning and 5% making beer,” he said.

Arcara has spent his morning designing labels for his current batch of freshly brewed beer and making sure the haul has state and federal approval for retail.

“It takes time, a lot of tedious government online stuff,” he said. “That’s what we’re doing every day. Instead of putting beer in kegs, we’re putting beer in cans.”

That means lower margins.

“We’re selling a lot less beer. The tap room is closed,” Arcara said. “You don’t make as much from wholesaling beer as you do from the tap room.”

The tap room accounted for about 80% of Red Tank’s business. Now, the brewery has shifted almost entirely to canned beer, although they do still fill up growlers to go.

The batches they’re working on now include El Camino Excelente, a pilsner-style beer the brewery releases each year to commemorate Cinco de Mayo.

“It’s a vacation beer,” Arcara said. “I just love it out of the can, standing by the barbecue.” That may be the closest a lot of us get to a vacation for a while.

Arcara has three bartenders, a brewer and a head of operations on staff. “We’re taking care (of them) as best we can. Obviously bartenders work on tips,” Arcara said. “When you’re doing takeout, some people think you don’t need to tip on takeout.”

That takeout includes some new, drastic precautions in the age of COVID-19, evidenced by the big bucket of commercial sanitizer set up out front.

“When people come and pick up, we’re able to dunk their goods into the sanitizer,” Arcara said. “This sanitizer kills anything within 10 seconds.”

Besides the takeout window, Red Tank ships beer to eight counties in New Jersey. “We have distribution through liquor stores, and liquor stores are up 100 percent,” he said. He worries about his neighbors — Toast, Bistro Red Bank, Teak and all the other restaurants nearby. “These are all great restaurants that people should come to,” he said.

The closure of non-essential businesses and restrictions on others have hit the Arcara family hard.

“Every day we look at that bank account, and it just goes down and down,” Arcara said.

The Arcaras’ brewery is not the only business of theirs that’s suffering now. Arcara and his wife Lovina are wedding photographers.

“I’ve got two businesses that were supposed to be recession-proof,” he said. “Because people get married no matter what. People drink when they’re sad, people drink when they’re happy.”

But the news isn’t all bad. With schools closed and business under

heavy restrictions, the Arcaras are spending a lot of quality time with their three daughters.

“I get to stay home and watch ‘Imagination Movers’ and ‘Peppa Pig’ with my kids,” Arcara said.

“It’s almost like a slowdown, like the human race slowed down for a minute, (to) catch up with ourselves and then go on with our hectic lives.”

2 p.m.

On a normal day, the doctors, nurses and staff at Riverview Medical Center would see patients coming in for elective surgery, an annual mammogram or to discuss the results of a CT scan.

Now, due to the pandemic, elective procedures and tests are canceled.

“Today, we’re not seeing as many of those patients come through our doors because, like the governor said, we’re encouraging them to stay home and postpone the tests,” said Kelli O’Brien, chief hospital executive at Riverview.

Now patients who are coming through the door need medical care right away, including those who need treatment for an emergency, such as a heart attack, or who are suffering from COVID-19. “They’re fighting this terrible, scary virus,” O’Brien said.

And in the age of social distancing, patients are unable to have their family members at the side, a cautionary measure to protect patients, family members and medical staff from coronavirus.

“We’re working with them in this new paradigm to help them stay connected with their loved ones (and) get the medical treatment they need,” O’Brien said. Patients can use tablet computers and applications like FaceTime to provide a vital link to their family.

Now, O’Brien is looking ahead. In the past hour, she’s talked on the phone with staff, discussing guidelines and practices that will need to be in place over the next six months.

“How are we going to practice medicine differently with this new COVID lifestyle that we’ve got to adapt to?” O’Brien said.

“How do we redesign our waiting room so we promote physical and social distancing?” she said. “What supplies will the hospital need six months from now? How will future cases be scheduled?”

“Today, right now, it was really about preparing for the future,” O’Brien said. “It was really about, what is our new future or paradigm going to look like?”

3 p.m.

Courtlyn Crosson is frothing a cappuccino for a customer. Her café, Coffee Corral, just reopened four days ago. She had originally planned to open 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., but the customers keep rolling through for pickups.

“We’re kind of keeping our lights on and keeping going until we slow down for the day,” Crosson said.

It’s been a slow Friday, with about half the volume Coffee Corral would usually see. Thursday was busier but the rain seems to have kept people indoors.

The café is normally open 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Crosson had one employee coming back to work Monday, April 27, and hopes to bring a second one back on as well. She aims to get the café running 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.

In the meantime, it’s just her and her husband Erich Reulbach running everything, every day.

“I’m starting to turn into a zombie,” said Crosson. “Things are getting rough.”

Crosson’s and Reulbach’s story is interwoven with that of Coffee Corral. Reulbach became a regular customer at the café six years ago, and he and Crosson began dating two years after.

They just recently married in Florida, on March 14, but had to postpone their honeymoon at the last moment. An hour before they would have boarded a flight from Los Angeles to Tahiti on their way to Bora Bora, they found out they would be sent to a military hospital upon their arrival to be quarantined. In-

stead, they grabbed a couple of hours sleep at a hotel and flew home.

“We grocery shopped, and then stayed home for two weeks,” Crosson said. “It’s not the honeymoon we planned.”

In the new normal, Crosson goes to work around 6:30 a.m. to roast coffee. In better times, the café would usually be “jamming” by that hour, she said.

But she has hope for the café, and for her community.

“We’re all going to ultimately make it through this,” Crosson said. “I think it’s just a matter of time. We all have to hang in.”

4:30 p.m.

Stephen Catania is the “Big Cheese” at the Cheese Cave on Monmouth Street. This afternoon, he’s busy making cheese and charcuterie platters for customers who have called and placed orders.

Like other restaurant and food businesses, the coronavirus emergency has challenged Catania’s business. He’s had to reduce hours and cut back his staff. Normally customers can come in, browse and try samples. Now they have to place an order ahead of time. They drive up to the front of the store and their orders are placed inside the car.

“The reality is that I don’t know if anyone is thriving,” Catania said. “We are trying to find ways to survive as opposed to thrive.”

Customers are responding with support and orders. “They want to know how you are doing, glad that you are open and operating,” Catania said.

Ayca User, co-owner of Antoinette Boulangerie, has had to make changes to her Monmouth Street bakery too. Social distancing means only one customer can come in at a time. And she’s also had to limit the store’s hours.

But now she encourages customers to place orders for curbside pick up, and has started deliveries through Door Dash too. She’s added pastry platters to the store’s menu and now offers a pantry program where customers can order staples such as milk, butter, eggs and bread flour, and even yeast, for pick-up later.

“We are adapting,” User said. “We are also trying new things that we haven’t tried before and it is benefiting the business.”

Some of Red Bank’s businesses are making it work. They believe in their business, said Laura Kirkpatrick, executive director of Red Bank RiverCenter.

“Our businesses are hurting,” Kirkpatrick said. “But the ones that are adapting and thinking outside the box... are doing better.”

6 p.m.

There’s only one dinner time at Lunch Break, the food pantry on Drs. James Parker Boulevard. And that’s at 6 p.m. on Friday night, when the community in need would typically gather for a sit-down dinner.

But there’s nothing typical about these days. With social distancing and concerns about the spread of COVID-19, Lunch Break’s community dinner is now grab-and-go, just like its daily lunches during the week. Tonight, it’s a chicken or pork loin dinner donated by SuperFoodtown.

“The community dinner really represents everything Lunch Break is about,” said Gwen Love, Lunch Break’s executive director.

“It was a nice meal of people coming together of all races and economic situations. Many of them were our regulars but many times we would get new people.”

The move to grab-and-go has been hard. Many of Lunch Break’s clients are older or live alone and may not have family nearby, Love said.

“You can put as much love in a bag as you want to, but it doesn’t replace the human contact and socialization that people so need,” she said.

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