No ‘Herd Immunity’ with COVID-19

BY CHRIS TREDaWAY
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www.piedmontexedra.com

With the endless flurry of information, rumors and conflicting claims made daily about the novel coronavirus, it’s good to have an expert to cut through the confusion and fear — even if the news is not what people hope to hear.

There will be no “herd immunity” with COVID-19 and society is not approaching any light at the end of a tunnel, noted epidemiologist Dr. George Rutherford told the annual meeting of the League of Women Voters, held online May 6th via Zoom. Asked later to expand on that, he wrote by email “We are years away from this (and it will cost literally tens of thousands of premature death).”

The Piedmont resident, who heads the Division of Infectious Disease and Global Epidemiology at UC San Francisco and is a professor of Epidemiology and Health Administration at UC Berkeley, works with the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on the spread and control of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases.

The bottom line, Rutherford said, is that this is not the time for reopening the economy and resuming life as it was. Precautions such as face masks, maintaining social distancing, avoiding contact and frequent hand-washing should remain in place to ward off a major spike in new novel coronavirus cases and deaths.

Rutherford noted that some states haven’t implemented shelter-in-place rules and others “have walked away” from protective measures, saying that unless measures are maintained projections are that new cases will increase to 200,000 daily by summer, according to projections presented to the White House.

“That is an astronomical number,” he said. “Opening the economy is going to mean more disease, more death.”

California has in general has been successful in its measures and “The Bay Area has done remarkably well” in containing the spread of the virus, Rutherford said, even in stemming the transmission of the virus at facilities such as 750-bed Laguna Honda Hospital in San Francisco, where an outbreak has been limited to five patients and 16 staff members. Without protective measures, new cases “can spread like wildfire” at nursing homes, homeless shelters and other group living situations.

“San Francisco has been able to suppress transmission at an earlier stage than Los Angeles,” he said.

Rutherford cited the death toll of 56,000 in Vietnam and 34,000 in the Korean War, saying that without precautions “We’re going to equal that every month. This is the grim reality.”

Dine-In Guide

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I like Chicago. As the song goes, it’s my kind of town. High energy. Midwest can-do spirit. Plenty to see. Getting around town for me is typically on foot or the CTA although I’ve also rented bikes and cars. The Chicago River water taxis are my favorite way to go; transportation plus awesome views.

Wrigley Field is a fun place to visit; even better if the Cubs are playing. Lou Mitchell’s for a good breakfast. Gino’s East for deep dish pizza. Oh yes, I always get a Chicago hot dog or two when visiting. Never with ketchup!

While in the Windy City (or most anywhere) I marvel at how a city works. So many moving parts. Everything meshes, maintained by an army of men and women, often behind the scenes.

Public safety workers are quite visible. But I look at the unsung heros too. Street repair gangs, sanitation workers, electricians, gardeners, transit operators, drawbridge tenders, not to mention the hundreds of clerks, IT geeks and department heads at City Hall. They’re all professionals in their own fields and they truly are what make Chicago, as Mayor Daley once proudly proclaimed, “The City that Works.”

Then it’s time return to small town El Cerrito and realize that the exact same thing happens here every day in our city of 25,000. It’s just not as apparent with everything on a much smaller scale. But this city works as well—or maybe better—than Chicago, thanks to a dedicated team of city employees. (Tip the hat to city management as well, as they choreograph the whole routine.) We’re in it together and good people make it work.

I make it a point to wave to our public works crews who are on the job, COVID-19 or not. Our city is far from shut down with the business of city government most essential.

Thank you all for keeping El Cerrito running during the tough times. You don’t get much appreciation but I’ll give you some right here. Now, do we have an El Cerrito style hot dog?

Comings & Goings. Last month saw El Mono Peruvian Comfort Food finally move into their new location at 11720 San Pablo Ave., opposite Honda of El Cerrito. Take out only, of course. Call 510-778-8854.

Los Moles Beer Garden opened for grab and go in mid-May. 6120 Potrero Ave., and open all week. 510-230-4855.

The sad news is that Armadillo Pizza has permanently closed. They had a loyal following. If you want to get into the pizza business, contact Ashley at info@armadillopizza.com as equipment is for sale.

New MD & Urgent Care, at Moeser and San Pablo, is closed. The company’s website says it’s temporary and “due to limited staffing availability.”

Honda of El Cerrito is open again and selling cars with SIP orders eased. Likewise for Big 5 Sporting Goods.

Copy Central is another business that has reopened at Moeser and San Pablo with social distancing protocols.

Weed. Construction slowly continues at Bishop Center (Conlon and San Pablo) on El Cerrito’s first marijuana outlet. Frustrated elected officials would love to see some tax revenue, so the principals of this enterprise say they’ll now update City Council members every Friday on their progress. Subject to change, opening could be in 30 to 45 days.

Thank you to all the essential, hard working grocery clerks serving our city along with stockers and baggers. A special shout out to Laurie and Peter at Giovanni’s Produce & Grocery at the corner of Potrero and Liberty.

Remember “It”? Until closing in 1982 El Cerrito’s “It” Club at the corner of Central and San Pablo was the center of local entertainment. With a run of over 40 years, it was the final holdout of our once thriving night club and bar scene.

Gatto Design is offering an “It” Club shirt with an original matchbook graphic. Sale proceeds benefit the U.S. Bartenders Guild Napa-Sonoma Chapter to support local bartenders.

Tim Gatto is the grandson of Walt and Eda, former owners of the club. Gatto Design does branding and package design, primarily for the wine industry. https://gatto.design/shop to order; $30. Silkscreened in Napa.

Opinions. We’ve got ‘em here on almost every page. Unless specifically stated, none of them, including my blather, are official Chamber positions. When the Board of Directors takes a position on any topic, you will be informed.

Farmers Market news. Fresh salmon is available on Saturdays from Hudson Fish. On Tuesdays, Julie’s, a new vendor, offers roasted corn and potatoes. To comply with the various directives, procedures have been changed at the market to permit social distancing. No more samples, either.

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[The market will be closed July 4th]

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Economic Recovery is an Opportunity for the Climate

By Julian Canete and Matt Cate

While the current COVID-19 crisis can easily stoke fear and anxiety, it also offers a window into what we can accomplish when we work together.

We have come together to move mountains to mitigate this pandemic like never before. While we are not out of the woods yet, the unity and commitment to addressing COVID-19 displayed by Californians will be essential in tackling a separate crisis that has been unfolding for decades, climate change.

Instances of collaboration and togetherness are all around us. Neighbors are helping at-risk community members accomplish essential errands like grocery shopping. Counties and cities are accelerating their programs to house their homeless populations. States are collaborating on best practices and regional approaches to fight the disease.

California must prepare to meet the threat of climate change with the same unity, tenacity and resolve as it has the COVID-19 pandemic. Moments of crisis often present opportunity, and the current public health crisis is no different.

As Governor Newsom, the Legislature and the Tom Steyer-led Task Force on Business and Jobs Recovery take steps to climb out of the current economic downturn, our recovery has a golden opportunity to focus on climate change. Significant public investment in clean energy is a commonsense solution to put millions of people back to work while fighting for a better tomorrow. Just as Governor Newsom said during his May Revise press conference, the way out of this COVID-19 crisis is through the economy.

Public investment in clean energy in moments of economic crisis is not unprecedented. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), passed in the wake of the Great Recession, provided the funding that made some of California’s most ambitious and innovative clean energy projects a reality. The clean energy programs of the ARRA supported more than 900,000 jobs, according to White House estimates.

The impact of these early investments cannot be understated in California. The clean energy workforce had since grown into a booming industry, supporting a diverse and highly skilled workforce of over half a million workers, spread across all of our counties.

Now, more than ever, these workers need our support. Communities of color in California are especially impacted by the economic pressures of COVID-19 due to other co-occurring challenges such as the state’s worsening housing crisis, wage stagnation and other disparities affecting Californians of color. Investing in our diverse communities and workforce will allow us all the opportunity to thrive.

Fighting climate change and supporting the workers on the front lines of the battle must remain a central and immediate focus. California has spent more than a decade positioning the state as a global leader in the fight against climate change. A setback to our climate goals could have negative repercussions around the world. According to the Legislative Analyst’s Office, the state’s emissions goals have set the bar for the nation, driving down emissions in the energy sector by as much as 40 percent. Even in the face of bankruptcy of our largest utility, California was able to keep its commitments to generating renewable energy. But we will have to do more and think bigger in order to meet our long-term climate goals.

More than 36.5 million Americans have filed for unemployment since the public health crisis began. Governor Newsom’s May Revise projected that one in four Californians would be out of work in the second quarter of 2020. As we look to put the American people back to work, our vision of a clean energy future provides opportunity to solve the crisis of today and head off the crisis of tomorrow. It will take a concerted and ambitious effort, but judging by our resolve to fight the current public health crisis, we are up to the challenge.

[Julian Canete is President and CEO of the California Hispanic Chambers of Commerce and Matt Cate is Executive Director of the Alliance for Climate Resistant California.]

EC Budget Workshop

By John C. Stashik

The El Cerrito City Council and City Manager continue to tackle a challenging budget situation this year made worse by the pandemic. Management Partners has been hired to assist.

A fiscal response plan is being developed with both short and long term strategies to close the budget gap and build reserves. Complete information is available on the City’s website.

A budget workshop will be held during a video City Council meeting at 1 p.m. on Tuesday, June 9th. To view an agenda or submit comments, visit the City website at: el-cerrito.org.
By Chris Treadway

[This interview was done in late April]

The El Cerrito Police Department has made structural changes during the current novel coronavirus quarantining mandate and may face more changes as the extent of the city's growing financial crisis comes into focus.

Through it all “I would like people to know our police officers are still out there, still patrolling the streets looking for crime,” Police Chief Paul Keith said in an interview. “We’re available 24 hours a day so you shouldn’t hesitate to call.”

The department has reconfigured shifts so that officers work seven straight 12-hour shifts and then have 14 days off, the amount of quarantine time for those potentially exposed to the virus.

The staff restructuring includes reassigning detectives to help on the street so all shifts are covered and many calls are handled remotely rather than face-to-face.

And officers that do respond to calls likely won’t enter a residence unless absolutely necessary.

“It’s a different way of doing business right now, but we’re doing it to try and keep the community safe and healthy,” Keith said.

The department has had some preparation for widespread public emergencies, “But it’s definitely not what we expected,” Keith said of the blanket shelter order that has kept people at home and shuttered many businesses at least temporarily.

“It was always one of the scenarios I thought about. The pandemic broke out and then I saw the movie ‘Contagion’ and it all became clear,” he said with a chuckle.

The enactment of a mass quarantine for the first time in more than a century does have an upside.

“There’s been a significant reduction in crime,” Keith said, noting that the cases department typically gets are mostly down, including residential and auto burglaries, commercial robberies, smash-and-grab vehicle burglaries in commercial areas.

“Houses are harder to break into when everybody is at home,” he said, noting that neighborhood auto burglaries have declined for the same reason.

Violent crime on the BART path and elsewhere is down because “there are so many people out and about,” Keith said, adding, “If it was like that all the time on the Ohlone Greenway it would really drive down crime.”

And currently there are very few commuters walking home from BART stations and carrying electronics that make them targets.

The city is seeing an increase in stolen vehicles, however.

Commercial theft, meanwhile, is still happening, particularly the grab-and-run type of crimes, but has shifted.

“One observation I’ve seen from the businesses in town is that where they have line control to get in, such as Safeway and Trader Joe’s, theft has dropped,” Keith said, while essential retailers without entrance control are still seeing thefts.

He said Walgreens recently had a grab-and-run incident in which the suspect used a pitbull to threaten the security guard and the District Attorney insisted that the suspect stay in custody as a result.

“The last place you want to be in a pandemic is the county jail,” Keith said.

“But we also have a lot of constraints put on us by the judicial system,” he said, with many suspects being cited and released because the cases won’t be heard in court until after the pandemic has ended.
“There’s a certain level of desperation among people who don’t have housing or don’t have an income,” Keith said.

As part of the shelter order, “There’s a push to get people experiencing homelessness into hotel rooms,” he said. “I hope they get support doing this so the level of desperation and frustration goes down. It does take time finding housing for so many people.”

Another growing source of calls to the department are people reporting violations of the shelter order.

“Absolutely. We’ve had so many,” Keith said with a chuckle.

“We’ve had different types of responses, different things officers have seen and taken care of,” he said. “There was a (youth baseball) team practicing at Cerrito Vista Park and an officer had an educational moment with the parents.”

Officers try to resolve issues without confrontation. “It’s never fun to tell people they can’t play in the park with their kids,” Keith said.

Many of the calls concern landscaping and residential construction.

“We handle those on a case-by-case basis,” Keith said. “Some people have to get a construction project wrapped up so they can move back into the home, so it could be an essential project.”

Landscaping work can also be essential, “Especially as we enter fire season. You want landscapers doing weed mitigation around properties,” he said.

Others are not essential. “Officers found a resident installing a putting green and had another educational moment,” Keith said. “It’s a balancing act we get to do to decide how to deal with complaints.”

As the department deals with changes caused by the shelter order it is also bracing for the full impact of spending cuts the city must make to balance its budget.

Reductions for the department likely include eliminating three vacant positions, and dropping a school resource officer and a community liaison officer.

“The school district informed the city it would no longer fund SROs at middle schools, so the choice was keeping an SRO at Korematsu or cutting elsewhere,” Keith said. “It’s definitely in the public interest to have safe schools, but it boils down to community priorities. With the very grave financial position the city is in it makes sense to cut.”

Current plans call for keeping an SRO at El Cerrito High School.

The community liaison handled community outreach, social media, event coordination and the like for the department.

“The officer in charge of that did a great job. There are a lot benefits to having the position,” Keith said, which made the choice difficult.

“It would have been nice to face this with two months of reserves in the bank, but that’s not the case now and it makes our position more challenging,” he said noting that the bulk of the police budget is people.

How to Contact the El Cerrito Police Department

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Public Safety Building: 10900 San Pablo Avenue • El Cerrito, CA 94530
**BYLINE MEMBER PROFILE**

**Pivoting the Business While Contributing to the Community**

**By Lisa Martinengo**

Before pandemic times you would be right to think that Great American Dry Cleaners & Alterations, next door to Trader Joe’s at El Cerrito Plaza, was a typical dry cleaning shop. Washing, dry cleaning, alterations and restoration were (and are) the “bread and butter” for this local family owned business that offers free home pickup and delivery. But some weeks ago, when news media mentioned mask shortages, something clicked for co-owners Ankit and Rachana Vikharia, who reside with their young son in Albany. Since they were making masks for their own team, someone thought it would be great to make more masks and donate them. The whole company is now involved with this fabulous and compassionate effort that keeps the staffers employed and helps the public stay safer.

With purchased supplies, seamstresses that were usually mending clothes, started to sew reusable fabric face masks, which the couple began donating to local frontline health care workers. Since they started this initiative, close to 4000 washable masks have been given away to first responders and others. They began promoting the program as, “buy one for you and one for a health worker.”

The program has been growing so much, that they are working through the process of offering customization of size, filters and even logos. Masks are just six dollars, so it’s conducive to getting more than one, to give to family and friends. Even though the mask momentum has been good, it’s still a stopgap measure, until virus fears are lessened and people can go out again and local businesses can go back to something like normal routines. Ankit and Rachana, along with Ankit’s brother and wife started the El Cerrito Plaza business in 2012, as a store front operation with about five people involved. This is a second career for Ankit, who has an engineering and computer science background and has worked for both NASA and Lehman Brothers.

As business grew, they began offering totally free pickup and delivery, servicing El Cerrito to Piedmont. Now, eight years later, they employ about 30 and the service area covers from Hercules to Concord and all the way to San Ramon! Many Bay Area hotels contract with Great American Cleaners to offer convenient dry cleaning for their guests. Textile restoration of clothing, rugs and other soft goods, due to water or fire damage, is another popular service that will resume once the overall economy opens back up.

Great American Dry Cleaners has two locations, El Cerrito Plaza, and a production site in San Pablo. They use only eco-friendly solvents and detergents as well as specific eco-friendly solvents and detergents as well as specific

**FROM THE PRESIDENT**

Continued from page 1

words have left a graphic image etched in my mind as it relates doing whatever is necessary. My father, just like my grandfather, had several expressions that he too used with regularity.

As a kid I recall being at his real estate office and agents would come to him for counsel regarding transactions and client problems. Often times he would give them a verbatim script as to how to handle the client and/or the situation. Usually, when the script was followed exactly as he presented it to them, the problem was solved.

On occasion, sometimes an agent would modify the script and end up “digging a bigger hole.” My father was not one to spend much time and energy performing multiple “post mortems” or berating agents for not following the script, and creating a bigger problem. His words were simply, “did you learn anything?” He was more interested in moving forward with problem resolution and getting deals closed, however, he recognized the importance of learning from past missteps in order to avoid making the same mistakes in the future. He also maintained a very cool and level head.

When agents, which in later years, included myself as well, would blow things out of proportion thinking that a problem was of such grave importance that the earth was going to stop revolving and fall off of its axis if the problem was not solved immediately, my father would put it in perspective and calm the situation down by saying in a profound sort of way, “five thousand years from now, what difference will it make?” In the grand scheme of things, the issue was just not that important.

For many of us, as we move forward, some tough decisions will have to be made. There will be some burning sensation on our tongues and some tears will fall. In retrospect the question, “did we learn anything” certainly has its place but the real blessing is in applying what we learned.

What’s behind us is behind us. Our energy has to be focused on moving forward, making the best decisions that we can make, given whatever we have to work with. Performing multiple “post mortems” and re-litigating every past decision is unproductive.

When people persist in being critical and bringing up old problem areas that have already been addressed multiple times, my standard reply will be “we are aware of that issue, it has been addressed multiple times, however if you have some
The effort to “flatten the curve” is to ensure there is adequate health care available and to buy time for researching a vaccine, which he said will — or at least should — be when normal life resumes.

“Winter is what really scares people who do what I do,” Rutherford said. “The reason is the 1918 influenza pandemic” that killed almost one percent of Americans. San Francisco, as now, had mandated wearing masks and was ahead of most cities in preventing new cases. But the mandate was ended under great public pressure in November 1918 and transmission of the virus soared, with 3,000 additional deaths by December.

“We are entering a precarious period,” Rutherford said, with “a fine balance between economic activity and death.”

There is a misconception that “we are coming out of the end of the tunnel,” when in reality, the situation is merely “at a lull,” he said.

The number of cases in children, who often show no symptoms, is under-reported, he said, which means a greater risk factor for others in the household.

If schools do reopen, it should be with schedules that allow distancing, such as alternating attending smaller classes on certain days of the week and attending remotely on other days. School absenteeism should also be carefully examined, with a quick response of quarantine for suspected cases and isolation for confirmed cases. Without these steps, cases could leap again when school resumes.

In response to an audience question about recreational activities such as tennis, pickleball or even playing catch with a football, Rutherford said the chance of transmission is unlikely. “If you’re worried, wear gloves,” and wash your hands when you’re done, he said. Washing is better than hand sanitizer, he added.

Asking about the disproportionate infection rates in communities of color, Rutherford said one of the primary reasons is that members are typically the ones in jobs dealing with the public, such as bus drivers, day laborers, and security guards, who often have minimal protection and little option other than to continue working. Until changes are made, the people in those positions will “bear the burden” of infection and death, Rutherford said.

“We’ve gotta figure a way to get people to wear masks,” he said. “We gotta keep people apart from one another.”

Contrary to some theories now circulating, “We’re never going to get herd immunity. Never,” Rutherford said. “We have to get a vaccine. This is serious, serious stuff. People are starting to back away from this. My job is to scare people.”

Once it gets all clearances, the league plans to put a video of Rutherford’s talk on its website: https://my.lwv.org/california/piedmont

No matter how monumental the issues of today may be, ask yourself this question, “five thousand years from now, what difference will it make?” Learn from the past but stay focused and apply your energy and effort on working towards all of the good things that the future has in store.
Dine Out El Cerrito

These restaurants offer take out food during the COVID-19 lockdown. List subject to change. El Cerrito Chamber of Commerce members shown in red.

Check restaurant websites as many provide online ordering and delivery to maintain social distancing.