

# PEN CITY CURRENT

It's Black & White and Read all over

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## FMCH CEO: Testing reflects resources

**BURCHETT:** Health system getting close to running tests to state lab daily

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG  
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON – Fort Madison Community Hospital officials are keeping numbers on local coronavirus testing close to the vest, but said the health system is close to sending tests daily to the State Hygienic Lab.

Shelby Burchett, FMCH CEO said Monday the hospital is closely following guidelines set up by the Iowa Department of Public Health and Centers of Disease Control for testing criteria.

Burchett said she was not comfortable talking specific testing numbers because the numbers were small, but said the intent of the restricted testing is important for people to understand.

“We don’t know a great deal about this. We’re learning about the sequela (the condition resulting from a disease) of it, and the most important information we’re getting is that those tests are critical for the sickest patients,” Burchett said.

Burchett said getting a test just because you want to know won’t change anything unless you are critically ill. Even a confirmed positive in most cases won’t change the treatment that screeners and doctors are recommending.

“If people just want to know if they have it, it’s not going to change the treatment plan. What we know about the criteria is



Courtesy photo

Taylor Freitag of Fort Madison, works on protective masks this week as part of a volunteer effort to help offset shortages at area health care facilities, including FMCH.

that they are targeted at the sickest patients and the most vulnerable.”

According to IDPH and CDC data, most people who contract the coronavirus will experience mild symptoms. The most recent date provided Tuesday by the state indicates that 93% of those tested are negative.

As of Tuesday afternoon 497 positives have been confirmed in the state and of those 268 didn’t require hospitalization, 61 are hospitalized, 33 have been discharged and are recovering and 7 have died. There

have been 7,385 tests as of Tuesday afternoon, which means less than 1% to date in Iowa have required hospitalization.

But Burchett said the hospital sends all tests to the state lab which is a one- or two-day process and then results are determined there. But she said the Great River Health System is now couriering their own tests to the lab, which she hopes saves some time.

“As a health system we’re getting pretty

See FMCH, page 3



## Keefe looks to unseat Fedler in 1st district

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG  
PCC EDITOR

LEE COUNTY – Tony Keefe and Ron Fedler are both seeking the 1st district Lee County supervisor seat, but they both will have to do it practically from home.

With self-distancing in place and the future unknown, the campaign for the incumbent Keefe, and two-term veteran Fedler will not be waged out in the public.

Keefe is a full-time Lee County dispatcher who moved to the area about nine years ago. Fedler is a former Iowa State Penitentiary guard and area businessman seeking his third term on the county board.

Keefe said he had thoughts of running in 2016 but pulled out due to a family health scare. He said Fedler had indicated he wouldn’t be running again this time, so put a plan in place to run for Fedler’s seat.

“Ron announced during his 2016 campaign that he was done so that’s when I made a decision to run this go round. I put a lot of leg work into starting a campaign clear back before he announced in August,” Keefe said.

“I felt an obligation to district one that has supported me. They encouraged me to stay on and run. Everyone was under the impression he was going to hang it up, and I already made that commitment. Win or lose, it’s important to try.”

Fedler said continuing to run is all based on health and right now, despite a hip replacement

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## CORONAVIRUS UPDATE

### Governor says she regularly asks for more testing kits

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG  
PCC EDITOR

JOHNSTON – Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds told reporters Tuesday that she’s continuing to ask the Trump Administration for additional testing supplies.

During what’s become a regular Facebook press conference, Reynolds said in response to a pool reporters question about the number of tests going on and what she perceives as adequate, the governor said she’s made calls to Presi-



REYNOLDS

dent Donald Trump’s staff asking for more tests.

Currently the Iowa State Hygienic Lab has 1,761 tests on hand.

On Tuesday, the The Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) was notified of 73 additional positive cases of Iowans with COVID-19, for a total of 497 positives. One death was reported in Muscatine County, a middle-aged (41-60) resident. There have been a total of 6,888 negative tests to date, which

includes testing reported by the State Hygienic Lab and other labs.

As of Monday night 61 patients have been hospitalized as of Monday night, and the state has seen seven deaths from the illness.

Reynolds said the state has been very aggressive in messaging and said parents need to help make sure children playing outside are adhering to the social distancing guidelines.

“C’mon parents, get out there and help

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## WEATHER

WED 01 Apr.....Clear Skies, 53.3° F/ 48.5° F  
THU 02 Apr.....Overcast, 63.4° F/ 56.8° F  
FRI 03 Apr.....Heavy Rain, 59.3° F/ 38.7° F

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# Lee County News/From the Front

## Officials push mail-in ballots

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG  
PCC EDITOR

LEE COUNTY – Lee County officials are asking residents to strongly consider voting by mail for the June 2 primary election.

According to Lee County Auditor Denise Fraise, the county has reduced polling locations to just three for the primary election to help combat the spread of the coronavirus in the county.

The move had to be done at this point, because ballots had to be printed and machines had to be calibrated. Fraise said at Tuesday's regular meeting of the Lee County Board of Supervisors that she had to make a decision this week.

"We didn't come to this decision lightly. We've been thinking about this quite a bit," Fraise said. "We're encouraging voting by mail, but we're doing a lot of things we haven't done before. This was not mandated by state, this was my decision."

Fraise said Fort Madison will be voting at the former Iowa Workforce Development office at the North Lee County Office building. Keokuk will be voting at the South Lee County Courthouse, and all other precincts will be voting in Donnellson at the Community Room. Fraise said Montrose voters have also been moved to the Donnellson location.

Supervisor Gary Folluo said he's received several calls from constituents who are afraid the move will amount to voter suppression, as well as safety of the voters, but said he supported Fraise's move to reduce the voting locations.

"I also promoted mailing ballots in early

voting. I encourage everyone to do as much of that as you can," Folluo said. "We don't know how long this will go on, so please request a ballot and vote from the comfort of your home."

Supervisor Matt Pflug said he had taken calls from people concerned about a possible bottleneck of voters at South Lee County Courthouse, but he too fully supported Fraise's decision.

Fraise said voter turnout for primary elections in the county has been low.

"Turnout is very low 11% and 9% last two years. If there was a general election, and God forbid we are doing this in November, we would have to do something different. But I'm also encouraging everyone to vote by mail," she said.

Absentee ballots can be requested by contacting the Lee County Auditor's office or by visiting the Iowa Secretary of State's office at the following link: <https://sos.iowa.gov/elections/electioninfo/absenteeinfo.html>

The first day of early voting has been moved back by Iowa Secretary of State Paul Pate to 40 days instead of the regular 29 days to allow for more mailing of ballots while self-distancing orders are still in place.

Fraise said all active registered voters will be sent a notice to request an absentee ballot for early voting.

In an unrelated issue, Lee County Engineer Ben Hull told the board the county had been approved for \$174,000 in traffic control upgrades for 15 intersections in the county. The money is a reimbursable grant at 100% to put in additional stop signs, rumble strips and solar-powered beacons.

## State virus death toll stands at 7

COVID - Continued from Page 1

me get those kids minding," she quipped. "You can still go outside, but be smart and when going outside practice social distancing... You can go outside for a walk and be active, you just have to practice social distancing and don't gather in groups."

Reynolds also said with Iowa expecting a peak in cases to take place in the next 14-20 days, Iowa is projected to be in decent shape for regular hospital beds, but may be short in other facets of admitted health care.

"We have 118 hospitals across the state. Right now they've been able to identify 1,500 ventilators, and 12,000 beds with staff for 9,000," she said. "We only have about 600 ICU beds and we have some non-adult beds we could possibly utilize."

Regarding economic relief efforts, Reynolds said she's allocated about \$2 million of a \$20 million authorization on small business programs, but

she is anticipating putting more money toward that grant program and will look at other allocations after the state takes a closer look at the federal CARES Act.

According to IDPH, the locations and age ranges of the 73 individuals include that tested positive in Tuesday's update include:

Black Hawk County, 1 middle-age adult (41-60 years)

Cedar County, 1 middle age adult (41-60 years)

Clay County, 1 adult (18-40 years)

Clinton County, 2 middle-age adults (41-60 years), 1 older adult (61-80 years)

Dallas County, 4 adults (18-40 years)

Harrison County, 1 middle age adult (41-60 years)

Iowa County, 1 middle-age adult (41-60 years)

Jasper County, 1 elderly adult (81+)

Johnson County, 2 adults (18-40 years), 1 middle-age (41-60 years)

Jones County, 2 adults (18-40 years), 1 middle age (41-60 years)

Keokuk County, 1 adult (18-40 years)

Linn County, 3 adults (18-40 years), 7 middle age adults (41-60 years), 7 older adults (61-80 years), 2 elderly (81+)

Marshall County, 1 adult (18-40 years), 1 older adult (61-80 years)

Muscatine County, 2 middle-age (41-60 years), 1 older adult (61-80 years)

Polk County, 1 child (0-17), 5 adults (18-40 years), 3 middle age adults (41-60 years), 4 older adult (61-80 years), 2 elderly (81+)

Pottawattamie County, 1 middle-age (41-60 years)

Scott County, 2 middle-age (41-60 years)

Sioux County, 1 middle age adult (41-60 years), 1 older adult (61-80 years)

Tama County, 1 adult (18-40 years)

Warren County, 2 middle-age (41-60 years)

Washington County, 3 adults (18-40 years), 2 older adults (61-80 years), 1 elderly (81+)

A status report of monitoring and testing of COVID19 in Iowa is provided by IDPH and can be found here. In addition, a public hotline has been established for Iowans with questions about COVID-19. The line is available 24/7 by calling 2-1-1 or 1-800-244-7431.

The state of Iowa has started sharing the number of negative tests conducted at outside labs, and is providing additional information on the conditions of those infected with COVID-19.

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## From the Front

# Local hospital monitoring PPE supplies closely

**FMCH** - Continued from Page 1

close to running every day," Burchett said.

"We have the materials to do the testing, and capacity to run several tests but are being very responsible to the guidelines of IDPH to test the sickest and most vulnerable first."

With resources being strained at the outset for testing, Burchett said the state is doing the best they can and taking the right steps as more is learned about the disease. The gradual ramping up of testing allowed the state to see what's happening across the country and what health care officials were learning, all while best using the resources at hand.

"I think the approach was a good one based on the resources available. This is all brand new to us and, as you could imagine, the testing took a while to ramp up," she said.

"The guidelines have been responsive to the resources available. They've broadened in accordance with that, but the restriction was good at the outset."

To reassure people in the area, Burchett reiterated that the majority of people who contract the virus will have a mild form and are usually able to recover fine at home with a fever and cough being the prevalent symptoms. But she said it's imperative that anyone feeling ill with those symptoms should self-isolate and not just at home, but away from others in the home.

"If they do start experiencing worsening of symptoms they can always call their doctor, and if they feel they are getting an emergent situation our ER is always here ready to assist," she said.

"I would add that if they are able, make a call to provide us with some advanced notice. We do have screeners and we can provide them with a mask to protect others."

The hospital does have a respiratory center set up to triage those that present with possible coronavirus symptoms.

Looking forward Burchett said the health system and FMCH will continue to evaluate the information and data coming particular to this region in to evaluate services and facility readiness and respond accordingly.

"We have, and will continue to tighten the processes in place to make sure we are providing the best care while protecting employees and the general public," Burchett said.

"We will continue what were currently doing which is basically only providing essential services at this point for the most part. We will continue to do that until we feel the current concerns or threat are under control before we would look at opening things back up."

She said the facility is not currently experiencing a critical shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE), but a daily inventory is taking place as supplies are being used as part of the screening process and for patients currently under investigation.

"We're keeping a very close eye on those."

The hospital has received several hundred homemade masks, but have also received other PPE donations from area dentists, industries and businesses.

Burchett said the hospital's plan for the homemade masks are to use them when the other supplies have been depleted as a back-up. She said the masks have to be laundered and are stored in a clean area waiting for use. She said they will be used as single-use and not re-washed.

Angie Budnik, the hospital's community relations director, said the hospital has hundreds of the masks and about 50 volunteers are on a list to make the masks. She said she envisions having close to 1,000 on hand as need rises.

Taylor Freitag, one of the volunteers, started making masks on March 21, not only for the hospital, but has also made more than a hundred for the Lee County Sheriff's Department and Fort Madison Police Department with a team of about five others who helped prep fabric.

Freitag said the hospital recently changed the specifications for the masks and it has made sewing the homemade masks a bit more difficult with the materials that need changed, but she's working on trying to secure the materials to keep going.

"It kind of went crazy. I had seen an article on social media that Cedar Rapids UnityPoint was wanting masks and I followed some sewing posts that referenced it and I stayed up late that night and made a mask," Freitag said.

"I was wondering if FM was going to need them in town so I took a picture and posted it and people started tagging people that worked at the hospital. Eric contacted a couple people and here we are."

She said she's halted making masks for the hospital right now after the change in specs, but hopes to pick up again. In

the meantime she continues to make mask for other groups locally and as far away as Quincy. She received an order Tuesday for 100 more and all are done for a free will donation.

Burchett said the hospital has requested for supplies from the national stockpile and they have received some of their requests, but not all, as the federal government routes supplies to the hardest hit areas.

Governor Kim Reynolds has stayed away from a shelter-in-place order for the state, but is instead looking at data and metrics on a daily basis. She said she is more inclined to do shelters-in-place on a community or county basis based on the data. Burchett said she agrees with that process, but doesn't get bogged down in the terminology.

"Regardless of what terminology is used, we are doing our absolute best at educating everybody, whether that's the governor, the CDC, news media, to provide everyone with

the power to keep stay safe and keep it from spreading," she said. "That's the most important thing, we will continue to educate. Regardless of what we call it, staying on top of the elements that are critical to prevent the spread of this is what's essential."

Burchett said she would add that the virus has been a real and new challenge for health care and the hospital administration appreciates all the support, prayers and donations that have come their way.

"Those mean a lot. We're having stressful days, long days and long weeks and that makes us feel supported as a community hospital."

Budnik said the hospital is doing everything it can to be ahead of the virus and the changes it brings on a daily basis.

"We have a great leadership team here that pushes initiatives to keep everyone safe," Budnik said.



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## From the Front/Classifieds

# Fedler, Keefe both look to economic growth

**PRIMARY** - Continued from Page 1

just three weeks ago, he said he feels really good and wants to continue to work for the people of the 1st district.

"Right now my health is really good and I have a lot to contribute to the people of Lee County and the 1st district," he said. "Being retired I can work a lot of hours that are just devoted to doing this. It's very difficult to have a full-time job and do this because you just don't do justice for the people of Lee County."

The first district is the only district that doesn't include part of the county's two major cities, Fort Madison and Keokuk. Fedler said it's important that whoever is in that seat be representing the rural parts of the county.

Keefe lives in Donnellson with his wife and two children. He said he got his interest in politics after working for the former KOKX radio station in Keokuk covering local politics.

"I was introduced to the political world by attending meetings of city councils and supervisors. That's where I got into politics on a local level. It took a couple years to pull the trigger obviously," he said.

After stints in retail, Keefe said he was trying to find something more meaningful and ended up as a dispatcher with LeeComm and has been doing that for six years.

"I absolutely love it. I get to see both sides of public safety, the front lines with first responders and also the victims of crimes and medical emergencies," he said. "I see a little bit of

everything."

Keefe also sits on the Lee County Democrats central committee and has been involved with a couple national campaigns.

"I really enjoy politics and I like being able to help people out. I love sitting and talking with people and trying to come up with solutions to problems," he said. "I do that a lot at work and it seems like a natural progression to think outside the box and help those in need."

He said he feels the county is in good shape, despite the cloud of the coronavirus and the current funding crisis for Lee County Emergency Medical Services, the county's ambulance provider.

The ambulance service issue is going to take some time and energy from supervisors even before the primary and general elections.

"Lee County residents have to have a way to get to the hospital. This has to be a priority as we go forward," Keefe said.

But he would also like to be a part of getting people in the county back to work in general terms, whether that means continuing to work on bringing more jobs to the area, or getting people to take the jobs are that here now.

"The fertilizer plant was a big project that brought a lot of people in town and put money into our economy, but need to look at our business and Lee County Economic Development Group to reach out and find out what is good for Lee County," Keefe said. "We have a lot of agriculture and the fertilizer plant was a good fit, but what else."

Keefe said he thinks the current board is performing well, and is being as transparent as they can about funding and budget woes, but said a new face would bring energy back to the supervisors.

He believes the sheriff's department needs additional manpower and the county has to find additional funding internally or through grants to get more deputies on the streets. Keefe said he would also like to see the county focus more on its public libraries as a resource to all county residents.

Keefe's campaign has set up a website at [www.tonykeefe.com](http://www.tonykeefe.com) and a facebook page for campaign information at <https://www.facebook.com/TonyKeefeSupervisor/>

Fedler said he wants to continue to be a part of the economic growth of Lee County that has been a part of his last two terms.

"Even though this virus has hit us, I really do see a bright future for Lee County and more potential, and I want to be there another four years and make sure we live up to that potential," Fedler said.

Fedler puts a lot of the budgetary pressures the county is feeling at the feet of the state government. He said mandates, such as mental health, that are shredding county budgets, are pumping up the state's budget and that can't continue.

"I would love to see the state take back responsibility they used to have when it comes to mental health," he said.

"We've had \$1.4 million in mental health costs in mandates from the state. That's a lot of money to come up with when the county has a \$30 million budget and the state has a \$7 billion budget. I say let us run the county, and you can run the state. That issue has bothered me for eight years now."

Fedler said the county is being tested right now with the virus and the lock-downs. Supervisors locked down county buildings with the exception of court services, three weeks ago for four weeks. The end to that resolution comes next Tuesday.

He said department heads' performance during this crisis is a reflection of how well the county is running.

"People think we're just at home, but a lot of these people are putting in more than full days from home and are keeping things running as best as they can," he said.

"I'm pretty happy with the group we've got running things right now. They are under a tremendous amount of stress because people can't get into the building with this virus spreading like wildfire."


Fedler, a West Point resident, said the county has to get through the ambulance crisis and the constraints of the virus and then get back to pursuing additional economic growth.

"There's absolutely no way I'll let Lee county residents go without ambulance service. We'll get something done."

The recent announcement of ConAgra's \$35 million expansion, which includes 91 new jobs, is the kind of growth he wants to continue to pursue over the next four years.

"I wanna see jobs coming that are good paying with what I call livable wage, not a minimum wage job where people can't even survive," he said.


Fedler feels Lee County isn't in as bad of financial shape as others and has weathered the financial pinch from the state as well as any.

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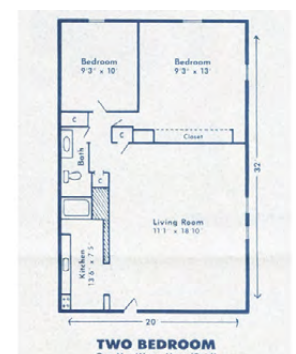
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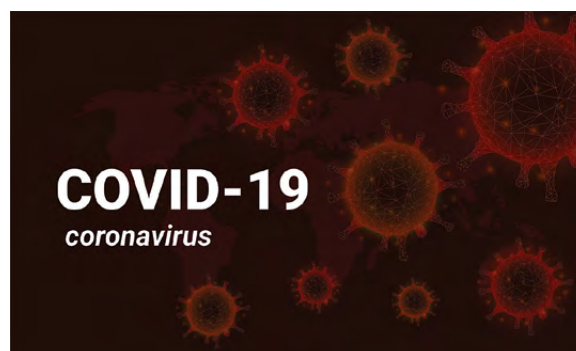
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