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Healthcare

Hermann Advertiser-Courier • Wednesday, March 31, 2021 3B



Gasconade County Health Department: Left to right: Rhonda Scheible, WIC Coordinator, 6 years; Brittanie Crosby, Public Health Nurse, 6 years; Pamela Miller, Public Health Nurse 3 years; Darla Schutt, Administrative Assistant, 9 years; Greg Lara, Administrator; Not pictured is Kelly Thompson, Public Health Nurse 3 years, Thomas Boettcher EPHS/Emergency Planner.

Lara reflects on first year of pandemic response

Ray Scherer

It's been a year of both frustration and triumph for the county's health leaders, and in the end it's a sense of great accomplishment during COVID-19's challenges that brightens one administrator.

Greg Lara, who heads the Gasconade County Health Department, recently spoke to the Advertiser-Courier for his thoughts about the first year into the rigors and victories over the pandemic. He said it has taken the close coordination and cooperation of numerous groups to answer the call created by the virus.

"We have our emergency plan in place for our county," said Lara. "We keep in constant communications."

Word that the virus had begun making its mark in remote parts of the globe began filtering to Gasconade County several years ago, although in bits and pieces. That led the department to fully establish its communications with the Gasconade County Commission, Hermann Area District Hospital, emergency management directors, law enforcement, and the like. Sessions were established through Zoom, and information began arriving from state agencies.

"Initially, everybody was putting in long hours," Lara said. "We always kept an inventory of PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) and a good supply of surgical masks, he added.

The early coronavirus cases in the county last year -- finally arriving in the late spring -- eventually funneled their way to the statistics kept on the CO-

VID-19 dashboard by the state of Missouri. Support was gained for the importance of stay-at-home orders. Community groups cooperated with the department that way, and by canceling events amid the threat posed by the virus.

"I applaud them for taking those steps," said Lara.

That cooperation extended to such entities as school districts and community businesses such as the hospital, who were integral to ensure contract tracing and in-depth case investigations could occur. The partnerships included the willingness to grasp the importance of quarantines and isolation when necessary.

"We wanted to make sure we got the word out," he said.

And with all that was happening, Lara said he had to contend with his own illness as the pandemic took route in the area.

"My staff stepped up to the plate," he said. "Everybody was pitching in....I'm extremely proud of them."

The much-longed-after arrival of vaccines "was really awesome" in spreading the hope to the county's residents, he continued. "That was probably one of the highlights of this whole deal."

Lara offered additional thoughts on working through the pandemic for the benefit of the community, specifically mentioning the role of the Gasconade County Board of Health.

"This group played a very important role in everything we did," he said. "They advised, and supported the department throughout this process,



HERMANN CLINIC

ROW 1

Ellen Schaumberg, Director, Clinic Operations

Beth Epple, LPN, Interim Director, Hermann Clinics

Kelsey Gerlemann, RMA

Leah Gerlemann, LPN

Kayla Spreckelmeyer, Receptionist

Jennifer Frink, Receptionist

Miranda Hartman, Patient Services

Samantha Schaumberg, LPN

ROW 2

Michael Rothermich, M.D., President, Medical Staff

Jessica Haug, PA-C

Amanda Oswalt, BC, FNP

Mitch Runge, PA-C

Corby Faerber, RN

Jessie Heying, Receptionist

NOT PICTURED

William Miller, M.D.

Shannon Berkemeyer, LPN

Annetta Duggan, Receptionist

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Bernadine Oetterer
Laverne Laboube
Evelyn Winkelmann
Bev Michel
Jaya Parker
Mary Binkholder
Laura Burnham
Brenda Van Booven



Other donors who stitched masks:

Marilyn Nixon
Nancy Stephan
Debbie Stephan
Theresa Long
Isha Deol
Maya Santosh
Nancy Hinah
Robbin Lewis
Patti Ryan
Rachel Bruemmer
Annette Bruemmer
Bev Luetkemeyer
Greta Hudson
Dorothy Scheer



Hermann Area District Hospital Covid Vaccination Clinic February 20, 2021

Row 1: Geri Schebaum, Jordan Haug, Jessica Haug, PA-C, Jessie Heying, Jennifer Grosse, Samantha Schaumberg, LPN, Leah Gerleman, LPN, Shannon Berkemeyer, LPN, Katie Scheer, LPN, Denise Kennedy, Sara Rothermich, Jessica Trentmann, LPN, Kelsey Gerleman, RMA; **Row 2:** April Hager, Christine Lewis, Annetta Duggan, Kayla Spreckelmeyer, Eleasah Kornman, Lauren Jacobi, Patty Vincent, Emily Cunningham, Amanda Osvalt, FNP, Miranda Hartman, Ellen Schaumberg, Michael Rothermich, MD, Carolyn LaBoube, Dan McKinney, Beth Epple, LPN, Mitch Runge, PA-C, Kelly Thompson, LPN, Corby Faerber, RN, Mike Mueller, BAS, P-EMT; **Not Pictured:** William Miller, M.D., Barbara Appelman-Graham, FNP, Krystal Witthaus, LCSW, Amanda Betzel, LPN, Jerry VanDellen, RN, P-EMT, John Knudsen, Brian Epple, Amy Schebaum, Tim Schaumberg, Jeff Berkemeyer, Melissa Schaumberg, LCSW, Kristen Hartzell, Jeff Wehmeyer, Sue Daller, RN, Matt Siebert, Trigg Render.

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Healthcare

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Hermann Area
District Hospital
 HADH.org

Hospitalists

Donald Swayne, D.O., 12 years of service; Jaya Parker, M.D., 20 years of service; Not Pictured: Julietta Avagyan, M.D., 6 years of service; John Garcia, M.D., 2 years of service.



Nursing/ER

Front Row

Rose Wehmeyer, LPN, 1 year of service
Lisa Schatz, Nursing Assistant, 2 years of service
Lauren Mueller, RN, 1 month of service

Second Row

Ruth Vance, RN, Emergency Services, 37 years of service
Carol Turnbough, RN, Emergency Services, 19 years of service
Burns Winter, RN, 13 years of service
Alywin Kluttz, M.D., Emergency Medicine Physician, 8 years of service
Sue Daller, R.N., Director of Nursing, 18 years of service

Nursing Personnel Not Pictured

Kevin Borgman, Critical Care Paramedic, Emergency Services, 3 months of service
Julie Clark, RN, 13 years of service
Andrea Conner, RN, 6 years of service
Ashley Cooper, RN, 6 years of service
Hannah Crowe, Nursing Assistant, 5 months of service
John Ervin, RN, Emergency Services, 1 year of service
Cindy Fleer, RN, 13 years of service
Kellie Gilbert, RN, 3 years of service
Donna Gleeson, LPN, 27 years of service
Vera Haney, RN, 8 years of service
Kari Huff, RN, 4 years of service
Hanna Jahnson, LPN, 1 year of service
Ashley Overkamp, Nursing Assistant, 5 years of service
Shelby Parr, RN, 6 years of service
Kristy Poe, LPN, 11 years of service
Philip Ray, RN, Emergency Services, 11 years of service
Rhonda Ray, RN, Emergency Services, 8 years of service
Samantha Reinecke, Nursing Assistant, 2 years of service
Laura Schneider, RN, 6 years of service
Kathleen Scott, RN, Emergency Services, 4 years of service
Kelly Thurman, Nursing Assistant, 1 year of service
Taylor Wright, Nursing Assistant, 1 year of service
Dana Sperry, Pharmacy Tech

Maintenance Department

Greg Stephan, Director of Plant Maintenance
Erin Reimer

Thank You
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Counseling

Pictured L-R: Ashley Kopp, MSW, LCSW; Krystal Wittaus, MSW, LCSW; Brandylyn Bristow, MSW, LCSW.



Therapists

Pictured L-R: Back row: Chelsea Webster, Susan Lenger, OTA/L; Amber Harness, PTA; Kelsey Kessler, DPT; Jen Blair, OTR/L; Natalie Grotwiel, OTR/L; Madalynn Wolk, DPT; and Gretchen Richardson, PTA; Front row: Jordan Mantels, PTA; Bernie Dildine, Secretary. Not pictured: Tracy Williams, Director, Amy Sanders, DPT, Ellen Scheible, PTA, Kelsey Crabtree, DPT, Kate Hoener, SLP; Isabel Hotop, SLP, and Sylvia Arevalo, R.N., Cardiac Rehab.

Jordan Mantels, PTA, 1 year of service
Bernie Dildine, Receptionist, 24 years of service
Chelsea Webster, Receptionist, 1 year of service
Susan Lenger, COTA, 16 years of service
Amber Harness, PTA, 6 years of service
Kelsey Kessler, DPT, 4 years of service
Jen Blair, OTR/L, 10 years of service
Natalie Grotewiel, OT, 2 years of service
Madalynn Wolk, DPT, 1 year of service
Gretchen Richardson, PTA, 25 years of service
Tracy Williams, PT, Department Director, 24 years of service
Amy Sanders, DPT, 6 years of service
Kate Hoener, CCC, SLP, 5 years of service
Kelsey Crabtree, DPT, 1 year of service
Ellen Scheible, PTA, 20 years of service
Adelyn Wagner, OTRL, PRN, 21 years of service
Sandra Hingst, RN, Cardiac Rehab, 13 years of service
Tonia Englert, COTA, PRN, 7 years of service
Dana Gooch, PTA, PRN, 13 years of service
Isabel Hotop, SLP, PRN, 6 months of service
Kathyren Southerland, PTA, PRN, 4 years of service
Carol Thompson, PT, PRN, 10 years of service
Sylvia Arevalo, R.N., Cardiac Rehab, 1 year of service



IT Department

Pictured to the left of the sign is Aaron Theissen, IT Help Desk and to the right of the sign is Jeff Wehmeyer, IT Director.

**Thank you
Healthcare
Heroes**

the Advertiser-Courier
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My personal prospective on COVID-19

I was asked to write an essay on my personal perspective on COVID-19, as we mark the one year anniversary of this pandemic.

I first heard rumors of COVID just before my family and I left for our annual ski trip in February 2020. By March things were beginning to move fast and seemed pretty scary. The Hermann Hospital Clinics decided to offer daily COVID testing in mid March, but there was some discussion about who would collect the specimens. Nasopharyngeal specimen collection is considered a high risk procedure (requiring full PPE, of which we had far too little) and our other providers and staff had more direct patient interactions than me. At the time, most of my work for the hospital was remote supervision of our Physician Assistants and Nurse Practitioners (as well as my full time job as a regional medical director for Kindred Hospice). So, I volunteered to collect the first specimens, figuring if I got sick, it would be less disruptive to patient care in our community. All the results I collected those early days came back negative, and life settled into a routine: riding my bicycle to the Hermann Medical Arts building, donning and doffing PPE, and collecting COVID samples each day. My first COVID exposure occurred on 3/31 when we had our first patient test positive. Positive tests trickled in -- a few each week. Around that time my family and I finished up our portion of the concession area renovation at the Showboat Theater, but by then events like an indoor reopening gala were out of the question. Then the hospital really started running short of PPE (especially the disposable plastic gowns and face shields). My son had a 3-D printer and with overhead projector sheets donated by the local schools, began manufacturing face shields for anyone who wanted them, eventually making and donating hundreds. The shortage of gowns was harder to fix, as they were not reusable. I eventually took one apart to make a pattern, which I outlined on a sheet of plywood. Then I bought most of DO-IT-BEST's plastic painting drop cloths and enlisted my whole family: we would cut them out, trim them to shape with a fabric knife and seal the sleeves with a repurposed vacuum food sealer. Eventually we got pretty good and could make 2 weeks worth of gowns for me in about 2 hours.

All of my PPE (including several weeks worth of gowns and my respirator) were in the old Hermann Medical Arts building when it caught fire that spring, but thanks to the quick response of our Hermann volunteer firefighters, I was able to salvage all of it. We then moved testing to Southwest Medical Associates parking lot, and I lost the protection from the elements that the awning at our original location had provided.

A bit after that, we became one of the first locations in the state to offer rapid antigen testing. We continued to offer PCR testing, but at that time it could take as long as 10 days to get a PCR result. Just before the pandemic, our hospital and clinics had upgraded our point of care testing machines (used previously to run rapid flu tests) to the newest version made by Quidel. This ended up being very fortunate as Quidel was one of the first companies to develop a rapid antigen test, and as soon as it was FDA approved, we ordered hundreds. This secured us a significant monthly allotment of tests and allowed us to offer rapid testing to



Michael Rothermich, MD

most patients. At one point, we were testing people driving from as far away as Kansas City and St. Louis, as they couldn't get rapid tests there. In order to maintain our focus on our community, we then started limiting rapid tests to established patients, or those that lived or worked around here.

Summer came. Running back and forth to the cars on the parking lot each afternoon in full PPE with heat indexes over 110 was miserable. One day I happened to note that in the hour of collecting samples I lost over seven pounds due to sweat.

By July COVID was rapidly spreading here, with new record numbers of cases each week. I met and spoke with our Chamber of Commerce and the City Councils of O'Fallon and Hermann, reporting my concerns and asking them to support a mask mandate. The Chamber of Commerce responded with a resolution in support of mask use, which I greatly appreciated, but it was clear that without a state mask mandate from our Governor, our cities and county would not support mandatory mask use.

Unfortunately COVID continued to spread in our county, and in mid August got into our nursing home in Hermann. Once there it spread quickly, affecting most of the residents and staff (many of whom continued to care for patients with COVID, as they battled the illness themselves). We lost over 20 patients in just a few weeks and by then Gasconade County had the highest death rate from COVID in our state.

We had fewer new cases of COVID in August and September, but in October cases began a long and steady increase, which peaked in January. Along the way my next door neighbors, the Jacquins, got COVID (and I had to quarantine after helping Mike work on his tractor), and after several weeks of severe illness and a prolonged ICU stay



on a ventilator, we lost his wife Marilyn.

Winter brought new problems with testing. By then we had built a small shed on the clinic parking lot and had overhead protection from the elements once again, but the cold could be devastating. There is no way to wear anything under the thin vinyl gloves, and in order to make sure we don't cross contaminate, we change gloves between each patient and then use hand sanitizer...which evaporates quickly, and leaves your hands even colder. After obtaining a few samples, those of us collecting often had numb fingers, and on one occasion my fingers got so stiff I dropped the sample and the patient had to go through a second nasopharyngeal swab.

By then I had personally collected the swabs of over 3,000 patients and been exposed in excess of 600 times. My antibodies were still negative (I donate blood regularly and the Red Cross tests for COVID antibodies). As miserable as the freezing cold could be, the cold snap coincided with a sharp decline in COVID in our region.

Despite being a relatively small county, near the end of January we were able to get almost 1,200 doses of the Pfizer vaccine. Since we don't have the specialized storage freezer, several of us had to make trips to Jefferson City or St. Louis to get more dry ice to recharge the temporary shipping unit. We put a lot of work and planning into our large scale vaccine clinics and we had only a few minor hiccups. We were able to administer all of the vaccines in a single weekend, and most people were in and out in just a few minutes. We also didn't waste any doses and completed all the mandatory reporting and documentation of vaccine administration within 24 hours (something many early large scale vaccine clinics couldn't say).

Since then, our county has maintained a place near the top of the vaccination rate for our state and we plan to hold at least one more large-scale vaccination event on Saturday April 10, 2021. Anyone interested in being vaccinated should leave their contact information at www.hadh.org (sign up button at the top of the page).

People ask if they should get the COVID vaccine, especially if they are not at high risk of having a complicated course. I reply that there are 3 reasons for everyone to be vaccinated when they are able:

1) To keep you from getting COVID (or from getting it again), because even a low risk of death or long term complications is not the same as no risk.

2) To decrease the risk of you spreading COVID to others, who might be at higher risk of complications.

3) Every time COVID replicates in another person, there is a chance it mutates. Every time it mutates there is a chance the new variant is a little stronger, or a little more contagious, or a little deadlier or looks different enough that our immune system doesn't recognize it as the virus a person had before or the one vaccines protect us against. If that happens (that is, if a new variant emerges that neither natural immunity nor the vaccine protects against) and that variant spreads and we don't contain it...we could find ourselves back to square one.

PLEASE keep wearing masks when the CDC says you should, get vaccinated when you are eligible and self quarantine if you get sick.

Thank you to the healthcare facilities and healthcare workers on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic.



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Back row L-R: Matt Schebaum, Kaela Crawford, Sherry Burns, Linda Stone, Tammy Juergens, Theresa Willimann, Jim Hoerst-kamp; Front L-R: Carol Brandt, Crystal Kinkead, Ashlee Kiderlen, Jeana Walsh.



Back row L-R: Brandi Fortman, Ashley Goldsmith, Linda Mattaline, Dorothy Cain; Front L-R: Chasity Metzger, Marissa Blocker-Strassner, Chelsea Williams.



Elizabeth Cain, Cristen Humphrey, Mikayla Romaker, Paige Weiser, Lindsay McKague.



	Victorian Place of Hermann residential care by Americare
Linda Merritt, CMA, 14.5 years of service (not pictured)	
Janna Schulte, LPN, Administrator, 11.5 years	
Lauren Battocletti, DON, seven years	
Bernadette Turnbull, Activity Director/Dietary Manager/CMA, seven years	
Madeline Godat, Volunteer, 6.5 years (not pictured)	
Rebecca Rector, CMA, five years	
Katie Rector, Cook/CMA, 3.5 years	
Allison Theissen, CMT, 3.5 years	
Sam Frink, Maintenance, one year (not pictured)	
Kaitlin Wells, CMA, one year	
Richard Fields, Cook/CMA, 10 months	
Christy Chaney, Housekeeping/CMA, five months (not pictured).	



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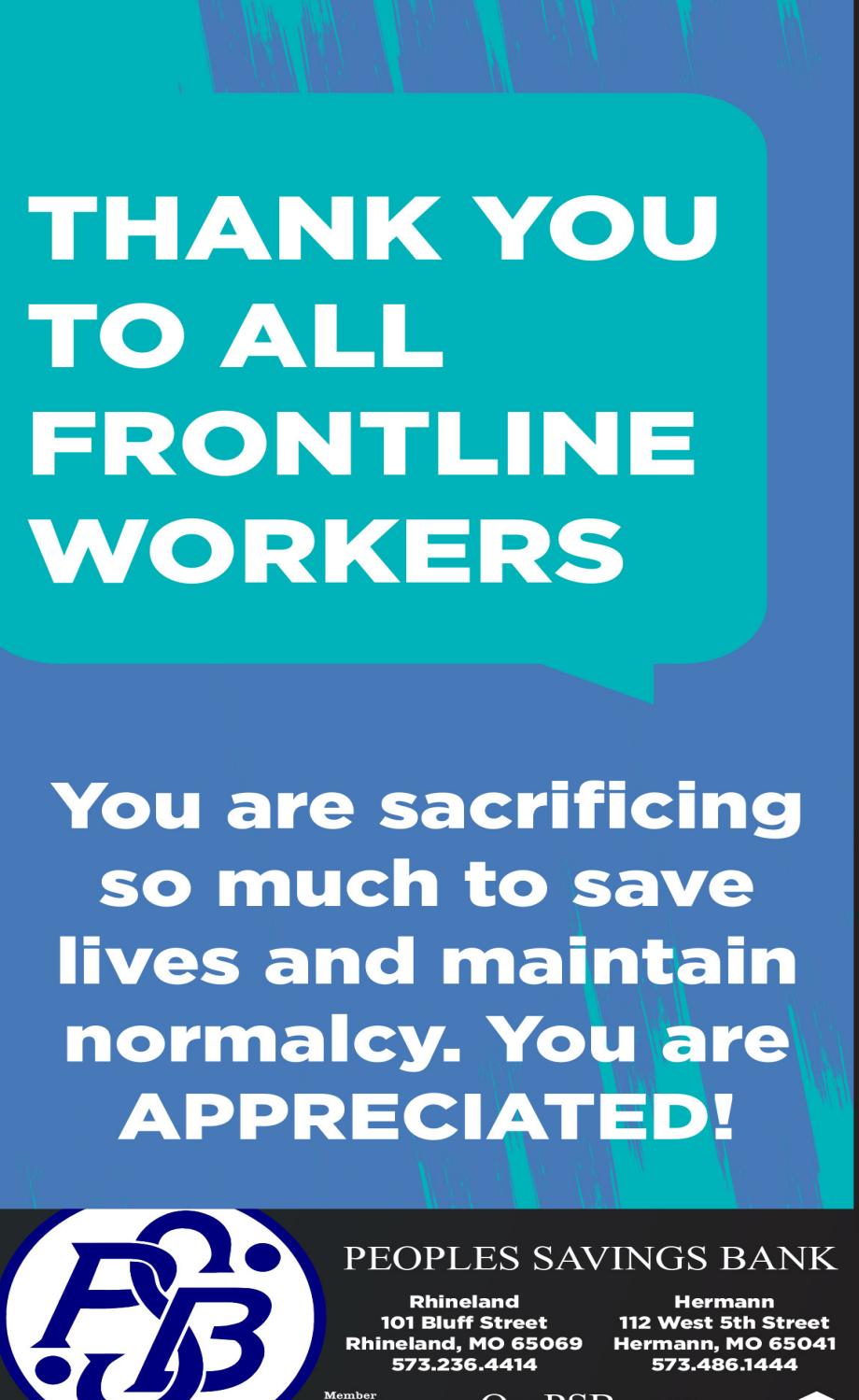


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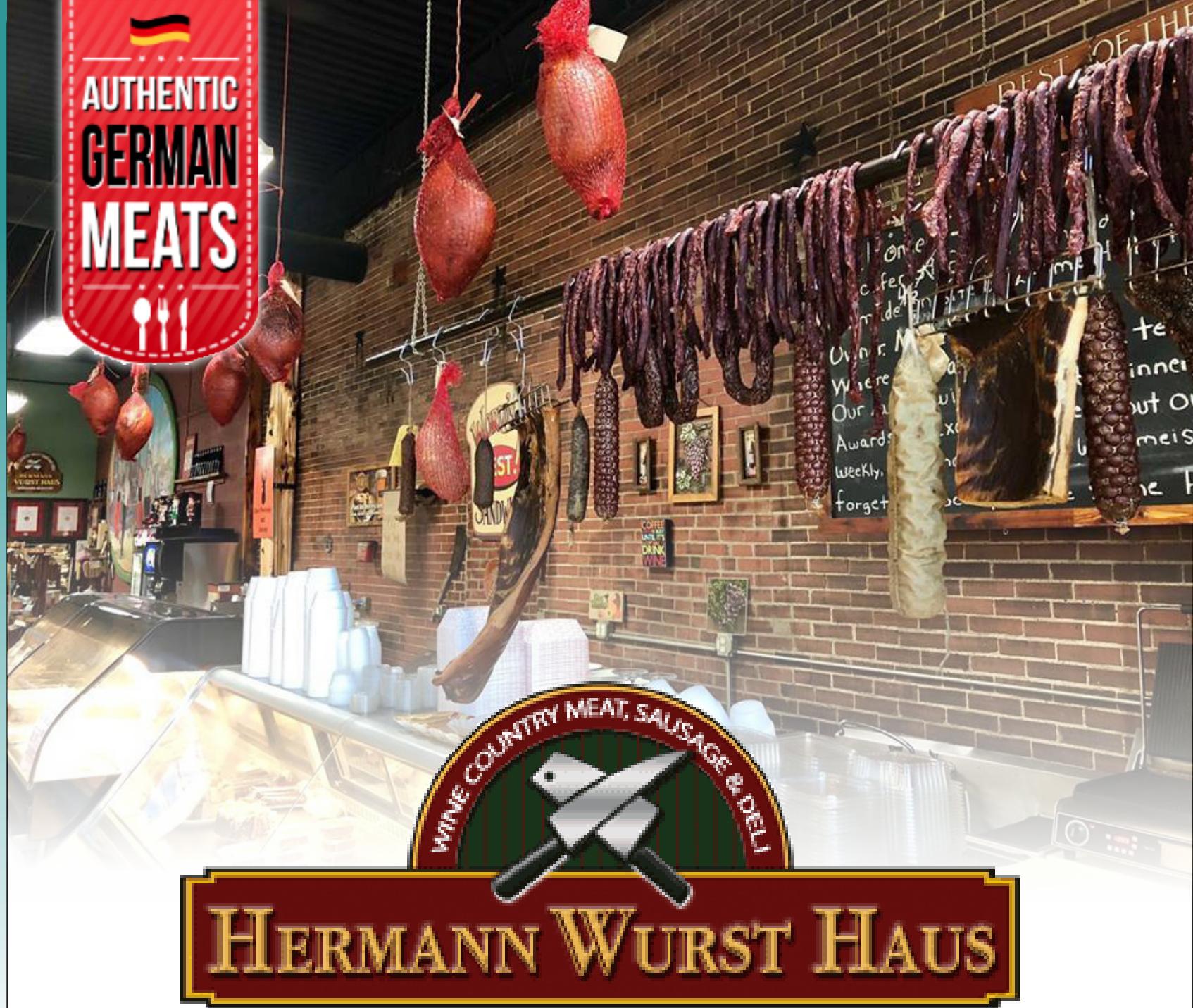
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