



Margaret Deadwyler

Former probate judge Margaret Deadwyler dies

Former Jackson County Probate Judge Margaret Deadwyler has died. Deadwyler died April 3. She was probate judge for 20 years, retiring in 2012. A graveside service was scheduled for April 7 at Cave Springs Baptist Church Cemetery. For her full obituary, see inside this issue.

County offices closed

The Jackson County administrative offices have closed except for essential public safety and health functions. The county's E911, EMA, EMS, Sheriff, Jail, correctional institute, solid waste, senior center meal deliveries and animal control will continue to function, but will be closed to the public. The county's courthouse is open, but operating on a limited basis, officials said. The move comes in response to the state's executive order by Gov. Brian Kemp to shelter-in-place.

JCWSA offices closed to the public

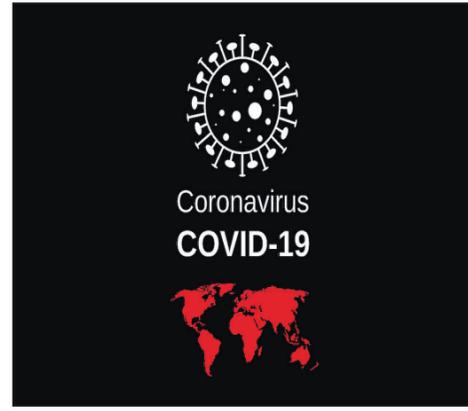
The Jackson County Water and Sewerage Authority offices will be closed to the public through April 30. Customers may leave payments in the outside drop-box or pay online at jcwsa.com. Payments can also be made by phone at 855-383-1792. For more information, contact customer service at 706-367-1741. Additionally, JCWSA will suspend disconnection of service due to non-payment until further notice.

MAILING LABEL

No deaths, but COVID-19 cases triple

Jackson County has not reported any deaths from the COVID-19 virus, but the county's number of confirmed cases tripled over the last week. As of Tuesday, April 7, Jackson had 21 confirmed cases of the virus, up from seven the week before. That trend is reflected in statewide data as well with total deaths going from 108 to 329 in the same period. The number of confirmed cases statewide more than doubled in the past week, from 3,817 to 8,818, as did the number of hospitalizations which went from 818 to 1,774.

Health experts predict the next two weeks will be the worst of the virus as it is predicted to peak around April 23 in the state. The number of cases and deaths in some other nearby counties have also gone up significantly over the past week (cases/deaths): Gwinnett County — Last week: 233/2 **This week: 525/10** Hall County — Last week: 65/0 **This week 196/0** Barrow County — Last week: 18/2 **This week 40/3**



Virus survivors say they're 'lucky'

First positive Jackson County patient reflects on virus' toll

By Alex Buffington alex@mainstreetnews.com
(EDITOR'S NOTE: At the request of the woman interviewed for this story, personal identity information is not disclosed. This article uses the pseudonym "Ashley" in place of the woman's real name.)

Jackson County's first COVID-19 patient may be recovered physically, but she's still feeling the emotional toll of the virus. Ashley, a Jackson County mom in her late 20s, first started noticing symptoms around Wednesday, March 18. The day before, she'd visited a local health department and had a birth control implant removed from her arm. So, when she started feeling fatigued on Wednesday, she thought it might just be from hormone fluctuations.

But she got worse. Over the next few days, Ashley developed a headache and noticed her fatigue was getting more intense. "Saturday night (March 21), I began to get a fever," she said. "I had chills and was really tired."

Ashley took a Tylenol and "sweated out" the fever overnight. She remembers feeling like she had pneumonia and an incessant tiredness. "I just don't feel good," she recalled telling her husband. "I feel very tired like there's no amount of rest I can get to feel OK again."

That night, Ashley started feeling a tickle in the back of her throat. She suspected it may have been seasonal allergies and took some medication. "And then my fever started again," she said. Her condition got worse quickly, Ashley recalled. "Two hours after feeling the tickle in my throat and the fever, I couldn't get in a deep breath," she said. "There was immediate coughing."

Her fever had jumped to 102.8 degrees. Ashley called Northeast Georgia Medical Center in Braselton and Gainesville, but they said they couldn't give her a definitive answer unless she came in. She decided to take another dose of Tylenol to see if she could get her fever down and told herself she might just be overthinking it given the increasing fears over the spread of the Coronavirus. But the next morning (March 23),

she knew it was time to go to the hospital. "I was just weak, very fatigued and super out of breath," Ashley said, recalling she could barely make it up a flight of stairs. Ashley and her husband went to NGMC Braselton. They were sent to separate triage desks and her husband was ultimately instructed to leave the hospital and return to his car. Meanwhile, Ashley was taken to an area for patients who may have COVID-19. She recalls seeing all the staff in full personal protective equipment (PPE). They got her IV in and put her in a room, which had a note on the door indicating the person inside may have COVID-19 or been exposed to someone who had it.

Staff did a chest X-ray and determined she had pneumonia in the left lung. The doctors then determined she needed to be tested for the virus, but said the results would take several days.

SENT HOME TO QUARANTINE AND MONITOR

Ashley was ultimately sent home instead of being admitted into the hospital. "The doctor said that he thought I had a pretty good chance of being OK seeing as how I'm young and I have no underlying conditions," she said. Doctors instructed her to get a pulse oximeter to monitor her blood oxygen levels. They told her to come back immediately if it fell below 94.

She was directed to self-quarantine, so she locked herself in their basement away from her young children and husband. But it wasn't long before Ashley had to be taken back to the hospital. "By 2 a.m. Tuesday morning (March 24), my pulse ox was hovering between 89 and 90 so we had to go back," she said.

The doctors ran some of the same tests and took blood. After drawing blood from an artery to see how much oxygen was going to her vital organs, they decided to admit her. Ashley was put on antibiotics for the pneumonia and given oxygen. That evening, her body was responding well and she was able to come off the oxygen.

The hospital sent her home again that night. **See First virus case, page 2A**

73-year-old Commerce man recovers from battle with virus

By Ben Munro ben@mainstreetnews.com

Bob Harper had a stomach virus that he just couldn't shake. Or at least that's what he thought it was. The 73-year-old Harper, a lifelong Commerce resident, returned from a 10-day trip to Hawaii just over two weeks ago and found himself suffering from a fever and chills. He figured he'd get better in a few days. He didn't. As it turns out, he was one of Jackson County's first confirmed coronavirus cases in late March. The county now has 18 confirmed cases (as of April 6).

Harper spent seven days recovering at Piedmont Athens Regional Medical Center from COVID-19 and walking pneumonia. He's better now, resting at home, but still feels the physical toll the highly-contagious virus took on him. Harper said he's weak and tired from having been "flat on his back for two weeks."

But he also considers himself "very fortunate." "At my age of 73, I guess I'm lucky that I was able to make it through with no more complications than I had," Harper said.

Like many, Harper wasn't overly concerned about COVID-19 when he began hearing about it, saying he never thought he'd get it.

SYMPTOMS

But it became very real to him. Harper's coronavirus symptoms started just after his return to Commerce from Hawaii, though his initial signs differed somewhat from other cases. "Actually, I never, ever coughed ... I never had any upper respiratory problems," Harper said. "But I just felt sick, like a flu or a stomach virus. I was cold (and had) chills. I'd have uncontrollable shaking."

He continued to think it would go away. But when Harper's condition didn't improve after five days, he sought medical attention at an urgent care facility in Jefferson, which sent him straight to Piedmont Athens Regional.

The facility admitted him immediately and tested him for coronavirus. The results came back within two days — he had COVID-19.

His reaction? "Scared," Harper said. Scared in particular because, being in his 70s, he fell into an age group that COVID-19 affects more severely

than the rest of the population. "I'm 73," he said. "I'm pretty active, and I'm healthy, but I'm still 73. Somebody told me, it's the second week that you're either going to get better or you're going to take a downturn, and you could die from it." Harper was also diagnosed with walking pneumonia after a chest X-ray. He was administered oxygen through his nose, receiving it for six days of his stay. Harper's status never deteriorated and he was never on a ventilator. Harper called the medical staff "great" during his hospitalization, noting that he was probably one of the first 10 COVID-19 cases the facility had dealt with.

Aside from visits from medical staff, Harper was in isolation while treated for the dangerous virus. No family or friends could visit him as the facility was under lockdown to guard against the spread of the virus.

With nothing else to do, Harper passed the time by watching hours of GPB (out of preference for its lack of commercials).

A second X-Ray of his chest, taken four or five days into his stay, showed improvement. But he said he really felt he turned the corner when his fever, which rose to above 102 degrees, finally broke after about five days. He noted that his fever had been bad enough at home prior to hospitalization that he would wake up "soaking wet at night."

"I was a pretty sick puppy there for a while," Harper said.

LIKELY INFECTED ON TRIP

Harper believes he contracted coronavirus at some point during his trip to Hawaii — and he wasn't alone in his illness.

All three people who joined him on the trip became sick as well. One other person has tested positive for coronavirus, while another awaits test results, Harper said. Another is experiencing coronavirus symptoms but has not been tested.

Harper suspects they all gave it to one another.

He said the initial exposure could have occurred in Hawaii, during either flight, or during a layover at LAX in Los Angeles. Harper thinks it happened on the plane.

"All of us have different theories **See Survivor, page 2A**

BOE discusses virus' impact on school operations

The impact of the COVID-19 virus was the main topic of conversation at last week's online meeting of the Jackson County Board of Education. Superintendent April Howard said the system's most pressing issue was to find a way to honor students and graduating seniors now that Georgia has canceled regular classes for the remainder of the academic year. Howard said the system plans to have a graduation ceremony for its seniors at its two high schools. For now, the system will keep its current graduation dates in place and will add three additional backup dates in June and July. Meanwhile, the system will continue with its at-home distance learning for the remainder of the school year which ends May 22. Officials told the board that most students have online access and that the system is establishing internet hot-spots

in areas where it's needed for students to have access.

OTHER NOTES

Some other notes from last week's BOE meeting:

- The 2021-2022 school calendar adds some extra flex-days at the start of the school year to help get ready for the opening of the new high school and the new Empower learning center.
- Site work continues at the new high school location with social distancing in place, officials said. So far, the supply chain for the construction project hasn't been affected by the virus dislocations.
- Financially, the system has seen some decrease in sales tax revenues before the impact of the virus. Officials said they hope the coming months won't see a "drastic" decrease in sales tax revenues due

to the economic slowdown, but the increases over previous months should help balance against the anticipated decreases. The system expected to have a reserve balance over \$16 million at the end of the fiscal year in June.

- Some system employees have been reassigned to different duties, such as helping deliver meals, in light of the school closures. Most systems in the area are attempting to avoid layoffs for the rest of the fiscal year, officials said.
- The system continues with its delivery of meals on Mondays and Thursdays (that will be suspended during spring break week.) The system delivers meals to areas where there is the most need, officials said.
- School social workers are working with families during the shutdown to make sure students needs are being met.

