



PHOTO BY AMY FELEGY

Scott County community paramedic Jeff Gustafson prepares vaccines at Shakopee's Canterbury Park clinic in early March.

Hearts and arms full

Stepping up to help vaccinate

BY AMY FELEGY
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Wayne Brommelsiek, a 71-year-old Chaska resident, is a runner. But it's not the classic marathon type.

Instead, the Minnesota Responds Medical Reserve Corps non-medical volunteer brings COVID-19 syringes from pharmacists to vaccinators during clinics.

The MRC recently asked if Brommelsiek would be willing to volunteer and get vaccinated to do so. "I said, 'Yes!' to both of them rather rapidly," he said with a laugh.

So far he's volunteered a handful of days, sometimes running, other times comforting people nervous about getting the dose.

Brommelsiek is among a growing number of volunteers in Carver and Scott counties joining together, yet six feet apart, to help roll out the vaccine.

There are only eight workers on her staff qualified to vaccinate, said Lisa Brodsky, director of Scott County Public Health — but about 1,500 people were set to get vaccinated in just one clinic day in early

March at Shakopee's Canterbury Park. "Certainly the need exceeds our current capacity," Brodsky said, regarding staffing.

That's where the can-doers step in. Thanks to volunteers, Brodsky said the Shakopee clinic brought in help from extra vaccinators, the Shakopee Mde-

wakanton Sioux Community, a doctor and nurse, public health professionals and students.

People can register through the county's online system or contact public health officials directly. Within a day of reaching out to previous MRC volunteers, Brodsky said over 30 people threw their name in the hat. A community effort.

"The response was overwhelming," she said. "They'll say, 'I'm available,' (or) 'I still have my license.'"

It's a similar tale in Carver County. Public Health Director Richard Scott said the county was using 70 MRC volunteers by early March, half with medical backgrounds.

Two retired nurses volunteered dur-

ing the Waconia Event Center clinic day in early March, along with a handful of nonmedical people, to vaccinate up to 600 people. Ridgeview staff were also brought in to support.

After signing up online, volunteers go through an online hourlong training through the Minnesota Department of Health. That puts them on a list to be contacted when needed for in-person or traveling clinics.

HELPING HANDS

Deb Larsen is a non-medical volunteer with Carver County's MRC. The just-retired 65-year-old and spends her donated time greeting people at the vaccine clinic.

"I think a lot of people coming in, they're carrying (a lot) on their shoulders of all this, this whole year, and they just have a great deal of hope on what this vaccine might mean for them and moving forward," Larsen said.

She's been helping at the Medical Reserve for years, but this is her first volunteer gig since wrapping up work

"Three people actually had tears in their eyes. I'm gonna do it right now. You feel it. When you know you can do good for not just yourself."

- Jeff Gustafson, community paramedic

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VOLUME 138, ISSUE 44
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