

May 2020 Column

Like the proverbial pony hiding in the pile of corona virus “stuff”, I’d like to uncover some good news pertaining to our fair city.

First, we just received our sales tax report for the month of March from the State of Texas, our sales tax receipts were up 8% over March of last year! We were expecting a sharp drop. Unfortunately, the state does not give details on the source of the funds, so all we can do at this point is guess. It obviously didn’t come from any of our locally owned businesses or restaurants, since they were virtually closed most of the month. We can only guess that it must be from HEB, Walmart, Home Depot, or from what we call the “Amazon Effect”. Last year, Amazon began collecting local sales tax on all their shipments, and we have seen the difference here.

Secondly, it shows that many of our citizens are working, and have disposable income. In fact, our unemployment rate for March was reported at 4.1%, which is amazingly low, considering what is happening around the country. However, we do expect that number to rise higher for April, but with the national rate at 14%, I’d say we’re doing pretty well. As I mentioned last month, the industrial base we’ve been building for the past 2 decades is proving to be a steadying force for our local economy. It also proves that large numbers of people can gather safely under one roof and still be productive.

It also means that when we finally get our local merchants and restaurants fully open again, we will have the disposable income available to support them.

The city government is now beginning to ease into opening up as well, so this Tuesday, May 19th, we will begin allowing the public to attend our city council meetings in person. This will be done on a limited basis due to spacing and capacity requirements. At this point, it looks as if we can accept up to 12 citizens in the council chambers on a first come, first served basis. We will continue to live-stream the meetings, and allow public testimony via Zoom. This whole experience has led us to thinking that all future meetings will be live-streamed in some fashion – with a much-improved audio and video quality.

Speaking of easing into opening - As this goes to print, we will be approaching Phase II of Governor Abbott’s three-part plan to open Texas. I hope and pray the plan stays on track. People forget that the intended goal of the “stay at home” order concerning COVID-19 has been achieved. That goal was to prevent overburdening our healthcare facilities. We met that goal, and it’s time now to get things going again. Extending the lock-down any further is just not sustainable.

The virus is not going away anytime soon. It will be here for a long, long time - maybe forever. I understand that the earliest possible vaccine won’t be available for six months, but there is no guarantee that it will be effective, or that the virus won’t have an annual mutation similar to the flu or common cold. Flu viruses change virtually every year, and the “flu shot” offers only marginal protection. And the common cold? How long have they been working on that?

Since our founding, Americans have accepted risks that presented much worse odds than coronavirus, but we still kept going. As I write this, 99.04% of the people in Guadalupe County have NOT contracted the virus. At this time, there are 18 active cases in the county, which is .01% of the population. 83 out of 101 total cases have recovered, and no one has died.

We’ve learned a lot in the past few months. We’ve learned how to protect those who are most vulnerable. We’ve learned more about hygiene and how to protect ourselves, and how to prevent spreading the virus. Our large employers have shown us that people can work safely in large numbers under one roof. We’ve also learned that for the overwhelming majority of people who have contracted the disease, the symptoms were not catastrophic. Let’s put that knowledge into practice, and get back to living our lives.

Isolation is a personal choice. I have no problem with anyone who wants to stay home. I respect your choice, but the vast majority of us have to get back to work. The alternative is just not sustainable.

Gosh I love this town!