



Olympians embrace new hobbies in quarantine

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The Desert Sun

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CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC



C3 Church Worship and Creative Arts Pastor Isaac Elguera removes furniture Tuesday in preparations for reopening at the church in Palm Desert. PHOTOS BY TAYA GRAY/THE DESERT SUN

SOME CHURCHES SET TO REOPEN SUNDAY

Houses of worship can hold services under rules

Brian Blueskye Palm Springs Desert Sun
USA TODAY NETWORK

Congregants will need to RSVP to attend, but C3 Church in Palm Desert will hold services on Sunday for the first time since March.

Coachella Valley churches can now reopen under new guidelines from Gov. Gavin Newsom. Attendance must be limited to 25% of a building's capacity or no more than 100 people. Additionally, church leaders are asked to set physical distancing guidelines, and implement cleaning and disinfecting protocols. Newsom also recommended staff and guests wear face coverings, and that staff have their temperature checked at the beginning of shifts.

"For our setting, the guidelines are clear for us," C3 pastor Isaac Elguera said.

While the church normally seats 400, capacity will be at 20%, Elguera said. Everyone's temperature will be checked at the door with an infrared thermometer, and hand sanitizer will be offered, he added. The service will be specific to adults and youth only, with no small children.

Before making the decision to reopen, Elguera sent out a survey to congregants asking them how they felt about coming back. His staff wanted to "know what people's concerns are, but also what they're excited for and what would make them feel most comfortable in church," Elguera said. "We are trying to do as much as



C3 Church vocalist Dani Jimenez, left, and drummer Aubuchon Martinez prepare the sanctuary Tuesday for reopening at the church in Palm Desert. Capacity will be limited to adhere to guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic.

we can to know who is coming into the building, which is very hard to do because we want to open our doors to everybody. But at this time and place, safety has to be No. 1."

The RSVPs, Elguera said, will help the church adhere to social distancing.

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Businesses struggling to pay their workers

78% in Coachella Valley paid a quarter or less of employees

Andrew L. John Palm Springs Desert Sun
USA TODAY NETWORK

Nearly eight out of 10 Coachella Valley businesses have been unable pay the majority of their employees as parts of the local economy shut down due to the coronavirus pandemic, a new economic report found.

The Coachella Valley Economic Partnership (CVEP) revealed Wednesday that 78% of local businesses reported that they have paid a quarter of their employees or fewer during the shutdown, according to a survey of 201 participants.

The survey is the second this spring conducted by CVEP, a Coachella Valley area economic and business advocacy group. The survey was conducted with the support of the Coachella Valley Economic Recovery Team (CVERT) — a coalition of economic, business, government and tourism organizations from across the valley that are working together to share resources and best practices in moving toward economic recovery.

Among the biggest takeaways in the report is that 99% of responding businesses said they have lost revenue during the shutdown, and 63% have laid off employees due to the pandemic.

Nearly four out of 10 respondents say they were open for business at the time they took the survey, from April 29 and May 6, 2020.

That number plummeted from 62% of businesses being open at the time of the first survey, conducted March 24-31. Most businesses closed between March

99% of responding businesses said they have lost revenue during the shutdown, and 63% have laid off employees due to the pandemic.

See ECONOMY, Page 2A

Black and Latino Californians are hit hard by coronavirus

Ana B. Ibarra
Cal Matters

In the city of Oakland, when census workers call residents, they're on a dual mission. Not only do they ask if the individual has filled out a census card, they also ask whether that person wants to get tested for the coronavirus. If so, do they know where to go?

"It's extremely creative," said Dr. Tony Iton, a senior vice president of the California Endowment. "They're doing census outreach in populations that are the hardest to reach, which are exactly the same populations that are disproportionately impacted by COVID."

These are neighborhoods like East Oakland and the Fruitvale District, home to predominantly African Americans and Latinos. And, since census workers tend to be local, people are essentially checking in on their neighbors, Iton said.

As California and the rest of the nation grapple with the pandemic, one lesson has become painfully clear. While the virus can attack anyone at any time, some populations have been harder hit than others — and testing and contact tracing in these communities will likely take more effort, according to Iton and other public health experts.

Contact tracers are workers trained to track down, interview and isolate people who have come in contact with an infected person.

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TODAY'S HIGHLIGHT CALIFORNIA, 5A



State Senate rejects Newsom cuts

The California Senate's plan to make up the state's estimated \$54.3 billion budget deficit rejects Gov. Gavin Newsom's proposed cuts to public education and health care programs — and instead takes more money from reserves and delays billions of dollars in payments to school districts. RICH PEDRONCELLI/AP

USA TODAY

Police killings take toll on blacks' mental health

George Floyd's high-profile death in Minneapolis is just the latest in a long line in America. Many African Americans before him have been killed by police, often with few consequences for the killers. Those killings take a toll, mental health experts say. Even on those who aren't involved. 7A

EPA sued over fuel efficiency

California Attorney General Xavier Becerra on Wednesday announced that a coalition of 23 states, Washington, D.C., and four cities had filed litigation against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for its rollback of fuel efficiency standards. 3A

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Churches

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“I want to make sure my family is healthy first and foremost, and because I don’t know where everyone has been,” Elguera said.

Not all Coachella Valley churches will reopen this Sunday, citing health precautions and a desire for more time to return to normalcy. But it’s a welcome shift for Elguera, who says people have been reaching out for spiritual guidance throughout the coronavirus pandemic.

“Our community is longing for something to grasp onto,” Elguera said. “A lot of times they need that hope, they need that peace and they need that love that comes from a relationship with God.”

Catholic, Episcopal churches to remain closed

Some church leaders in the Coachella Valley are not ready to reopen. Local Catholic and Episcopal churches, for example, will remain closed this weekend.

Bishop Gerald Barnes of The Diocese of San Bernardino announced on Thursday that Catholic parishes will reopen on June 13.

The Episcopal Diocese of San Diego also will not reopen any parishes this weekend, including Church of St. Paul in the Desert in Palm Springs and St. Margaret’s in Palm Desert, according to Chris Tumilty, director of communications.

Episcopal services last one hour to 90 minutes, and congregants sing with choirs that vary in size. Both Episcopalians and Catholics receive holy communion drinking out of a communal cup. Communion practices vary from church to church.

Bishop Rev. Susan Brown Snook has released a plan for reopening Episcopal churches in the diocese when “medical professionals deem it safe, and lots of steps establishing church as normal as expected,” Tumilty added.

Pastor: New guidelines don’t go far enough

Few lockdown restrictions have stirred as much controversy as those applied to churches, repeatedly thrusting social distancing efforts into preexisting cultural and political conflicts. Trump’s Justice Department has sided with churches over state shutdown orders in several cases, arguing the orders violate constitutional rights.

The Justice Department put Newsom on notice last week, claiming his plan for the state’s staggered reopening discriminated against religious groups. Newsom initially said California was “weeks away” from allowing churches to reopen, then announced new guidelines on Monday.

Pastor Diego Mesa of Abundant Living Family Church in Rancho Cucamonga said this week’s new guidelines remain inadequate for him and many other churches with large congregations. Earlier this month, Mesa was one of 1,200 religious clergy members across the state who signed a “Declaration of Essentiality” addressed to Newsom stating they would reopen their ministries to fully serve the needs of their communities.

The letter doesn’t list all 1,200 signatures and none



C3 Church Worship and Creative Arts Pastor Isaac Elguera, left, and vocalist Dani Jimenez prepare the sanctuary for reopening at the church in Palm Desert on Tuesday. TAYA GRAY/THE DESERT SUN



C3 Palm Springs’ creative team record their Sunday worship service for online broadcast. COURTESY OF C3

made public are from the Coachella Valley, but it includes Mesa along with pastor Dan Carroll of Water of Life Community Church in Fontana and pastor Tim Thompson of 412 Church in Murrieta. All plan to open their doors on May 31 for services.

“For small churches, it’s absolutely great,” Mesa said. “When I’ve got a church of 20,000 members and Danny (Carroll) has a church of 20,000 members, how do I put 100 people in a building? How do I do that? It doesn’t do us any good. There’s no advantage and there’s no gain. I’m grateful that there is some leeway there and it will help some churches, but there are a lot of churches that have been overlooked and it doesn’t serve us at all.”

Tyler & Bursch Attorneys at Law, which is representing the interests of the clergy, did not respond to request for comment from The Desert Sun.

Mesa plans to allow 20% of congregants into his church that seats 4,000 people. Congregants will have to register online to reserve a spot. Services, he said, will be as “safe and sane as possible.”

The church staff will spend 45 minutes cleaning

and sanitizing the seats, doorknobs, bathrooms, toilet stalls and doors, Mesa added. Those who are nervous about attending, as well as the elderly or immune-compromised, are asked to stay home. Congregants can expect to have their temperature taken before entering the church.

“(It’s) far and above what Home Depot or Costco is doing, which have several hundred people in them, or even big warehouses like Amazon,” Mesa said. “The idea is if they can do it and that’s permissible, than why do they think we can’t do it when we’re going far and above the norm, or what is expected?”

Mesa said asking people to consider attending church now presents the same as fears of walking into a big box store or shopping for groceries or going to work.

“My premise has been not should we open, but should we have the right to open and does government have the right under the First Amendment where we are mentioned to control whether we do that or not,” Mesa said. “It’s not an act of rebellion. I believe it’s an act of responsibility.”

Reopening churches is important to Mesa because of the services Abundant Living Family Church offers to the community during these unprecedented times.

“We are standing on the principle that the church is essential and it’s as essential as a Home Depot, a Walmart and a Costco,” Mesa said. “Most people are aware of a Sunday gathering to worship, but we are open the other six days a week with food programs. A lot of (our programs) deal with social and mental issues, whether those are sex addicts, drug addicts, alcoholics, people overcoming infidelity in their marriage or marital trouble. We have not been able to minister to these people or help these people.”

Desert Sun reporter Brian Blueskye covers arts and entertainment. He can be reached at brian.blueskye@desertsun.com or on Twitter at @bblueskye. Support local news, subscribe to The Desert Sun.

Previous reporting by USA Today reporter John Fritze and Kevin Johnson was used in this report.

Economy

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16 and 23, the report concluded.

The Economic Injury and Disaster Loan and Paycheck Protection Programs were not available at the time of the first survey but were for the second.

Gov. Gavin Newsom has since relaxed restrictions on businesses to allow some to reopen. But it may take many businesses time to fully recover, which in turn could result in a slow recovery for workers hit hard by the shutdown, the report illustrates.

Business revenue keeps dropping

More than half of respondents to the survey said

they have seen revenue declines, from anywhere between a staggering 91% to 100%.

Only 37% said they expect to survive a business shutdown of nine weeks or more, which was a significant drop from 53% in the first survey.

More than six of 10 respondents said their employee count had changed due to layoffs.

Another 12% responded that it had changed because of furloughs. Of those responding in the survey, the average number of weeks they could survive during a shutdown was 17, compared to 11 weeks in the previous survey. CVEP estimates that is due to the availability of funds from the Economic Injury Disaster Loan and Paycheck Protection Programs.

Half of respondents said they have contacted their bank about bridge loans or financing.

More than half said they had applied for an SBA Economic Injury Disaster Loan, with 19% successfully

receiving a loan and 39% still pending.

Fortunately for some businesses, 64% said they can ship 61% or more of their product to customers for a stream of income during the shutdown.

Survey breakdown

Among the businesses that took the survey, 65% were located in Palm Springs, Palm Desert or La Quinta. One in 10 are from Indio, 7% were from Cathedral City, 6% were from Rancho Mirage and 5% were from Desert Hot Springs.

Most respondents (85%) were small businesses with 10 or fewer full-time and/or part-time employees.

Businesses were represented from a number of different fields, including real estate, arts and entertainment, food and retail services, manufacturing and agriculture.

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