



A model for tiny homes,
BIG COMMUNITY

COVID-19

Small businesses: 'It's all personal'

By TESHAM. CHRISTENSEN

Local restaurants are adjusting to the Stay at Home order while other businesses are considering how to reopen under Governor Walz's most recent guidelines.

Hi-Lo Diner (4020 E. Lake St.) closed the Sunday night before the government shutdown of restaurants. It was a hard decision, but co-owners James Brown and Mike Smith were worried about the safety of their staff members and wanted to take some time to evaluate things.

Thanks to a PPP loan, the diner reopened for take-out last weekend, starting with dinner on Saturday, April 25. "We had 32 employees before the pandemic and will be able to bring a lot of them back on," stated Brown.

They are excited to be reopening, even if it is just for take-out, and Brown pointed out it is a huge help to be able to offer beer and wine to-go. They plan to also offer Bloody Mary and mimosa kits, in addition to brunch Saturdays and Sundays.

"I think the future of small business - and specifically restaurants - is to make it personal," observed Brown. "Small businesses give our community

IT'S ALL PERSONAL >> 3



West River Road is closed to northbound traffic to allow trail users more space to maintain social distancing. Sections of Cedar Lake Parkway, Lake Harriet Parkway, Lake of the Isles Parkway, Lake Nokomis Parkway, and Main Street S.E. are also closed. Because residents are still congregating in groups, playgrounds, skateparks and athletic fields have been closed. Tennis court nets have been removed and basketball court rims blocked. Gatherings are limited to 10 people or less, and trail users urged to stay six feet apart. (Photo by Terry Faust)

GAMES, MUSIC & ART >> CONNECT

By TESHAM. CHRISTENSEN Play a game together with your neighbors when you join in the LoLa Scavenger Hunt.

"Walks outside are still allowed, and are good for your physical and mental health. I intended this scavenger hunt to bring an element of novelty and excitement to an ordinary walk in the neighborhood, and also encourage neighbors to walk farther and longer," observed local artist Jinjer Markley. "Also, it's a game that we can play 'together,' and even check on each other's progress by following the hashtags. My hope is that more frequent distance-greetings with our neighbors will make us all feel more like part of a community." >> 10

A firsthand account

FROM THE FRONT LINE

By STEPHANIE FOX

Workers begin to show up at the small grocery store in South Minneapolis in the dark, to bake the bread that will be sold throughout the day. First responders and those who might be health compromised start arriving two hours later, at 6 a.m., just as the sun is rising, to shop for what they might need.



Stephanie Fox

The staff will be there to help, working in the deli and the butcher shops hidden behind the scenes, or in the front, operating the cash registers, stocking shelves and cleaning surfaces, until the store closes at 8 p.m., as the sun is setting.

When the COVID-19 virus first appeared as a health crisis, grocery stores were just a place to shop for food. But on March 25 the mayor of Minneapolis, followed by Gov. Tim Walz, ordered a lock down of all but essential services. Grocery stores were suddenly pushed to the front lines.

FROM THE FRONT LINE >> 12

While you're at home during this extended break from school, try these ideas from Free Forest School



Free Forest School Executive Director Anna Sharratt said, "This idea started as an outdoor play group. It has turned into a river I've been riding for several years now." (Photo by Margie O'Loughlin)

KIDS LEARN THROUGH PLAY

By MARGIE O'LOUGHLIN

Let them be kids, outdoors. Let them learn through unstructured play in nature.

That's the cornerstone belief of Free Forest School, a volunteer-led program that operates in 200+ cities across the country.

Right now, their weekly outdoor gatherings are, of course, suspended, but it's easy to put the principles of Free Forest School to use during this extended break from school.

Longfellow resident Anna Sharratt developed the idea for the program five years ago, when her young family lived in Brooklyn, N.Y. She and her husband had signed their four-year-old up for a pre-K learning program, and the kids didn't set foot outdoors for a whole month.

Sharratt, who grew up alongside Minnehaha Creek and camping in the BWCA, was stunned. She said, "In my way of thinking, learning and nature are inseparable. I had hoped to meet other families in the neighborhood, thinking we could get together outside of school, chill out, and play. I found parenting in New York City to be very competitive. The idea for Free Forest School grew out of that longing for non-competitive, quality time spent outdoors with other families."

Two months after Sharratt started the first chapter of Free Forest School in Brooklyn, her family moved to Austin, Texas. Once seeds were planted in those two places, people started contacting her from around the

"Kids are hard wired to learn through play in nature, but parents can get in the way with too much structure and over-scheduling." ~ Anna Sharratt

country asking, "How can I start this up in my town?"

Focus on supportive communities for parents and kids

The Free Forest School model is straight forward; it focuses on creating supportive communities. Parents can parent in different ways while encouraging child-led, unstructured play.

Sharratt said, "There are so many people who attend our play groups. Adults say they forge a deeper relationship with their kids through unstructured play, because so many of their usual power struggles disappear. There is less adult talking and explaining, there are fewer rules."

The suggested age range for children is 0-6 years, but the majority of kids are 1-4. Every Free Forest School chapter has a director. It's that person's job to recruit parent facilitators from the community and to train them.

One of the ongoing Minneapolis sites is Theodore Wirth Park, where a Free Forest School chapter has met on Monday mornings at a certain trailhead for the past four years.

Sharratt explained, "We have a strong emphasis on place-based learning, so we go back to the same place throughout the seasons. Kids love to explore in the rain and mud of April, the heat

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Rebuild Repair Recycle

ENVISION COMMUNITY: A model for tiny homes, big community

"There's a terrible housing shortage, but that's just part of it. The headline, and one of the things that's really different with our model, is that we're creating an intentional community - one where residents feel a sense of belonging. This movement has to be led by people who have experienced homelessness, and we have to be certain that what we're building is desirable for those same people."

- Dr. William Walsh, Envision Community advisor

By MARGIE O'LOUGHLIN

Dewayne Parker became homeless in 2017. For lack of a better option, he ended up sleeping for months on the Green Line train. One winter night, that sleeping arrangement very nearly got him killed.

Parker said, "Everybody knows it's dangerous living on the streets. What I want the broader community to understand is that anyone can end up homeless. Some of the most intelligent and resourceful people I've ever met lost their housing. It doesn't take much for things to fall apart."

Parker is one of five homeless or previously homeless community members serving as leaders on a new housing model called Envision Community. After meeting for more than a year, the group has embraced the idea of starting a community of "tiny homes" for the poor and homeless to be built somewhere in South Minneapolis.

Tiny, deeply affordable homes

Envision Community is a proposal to build and operate a two-year live demonstration of an intentional community made up of 15-30 people living in tiny homes, with the goal of creating health equity.

The tiny homes, just a few hundred square feet each, would be deeply affordable - appealing to the growing number of low-income people shut out of the metro area's housing market. They would be part of a cluster development centered around a larger, shared community house for meals and other gatherings.

What does it mean to be shut out of the housing market? For starters, many people with

low-wage jobs simply can't afford the high cost of rent in the Twin Cities. Other barriers to housing are having a criminal record, a poor credit score, a past eviction, or a chemical dependency problem. Landlords can easily avoid renting to someone with any one of the above.

Working full-time, single-parenting two kids and homeless

When there is nowhere else to go, people without a safety net may quickly end up living on the street.

Sherry Shannon did. Born and raised in South Minneapolis, she first became homeless while working full-time and single-parenting two children. It was a long road from homelessness, to living in a shelter, to transitional housing, to the apartment where she now lives in Roseville.

Shannon is also an Envision community leader; she is candid about her struggles, which include a PTSD diagnosis, and her successes. She said, "Once I got into stable housing, I could finally start working on my disability. Things came together pretty quickly then. I started talking about my situation, and trying to help other people move forward too. Last year, I won the Dorothy Richardson Award for community leadership."

"After I gave my acceptance speech in Chicago, a couple of ladies came up to me and asked, 'How did you ever get through all this?' I told them, 'I couldn't have done it without a place to call home.'"

Costly medical problems, homelessness go hand-in-hand

The Envision Community, if approved by the city of Minneapolis,



Sherry Shannon is one of five formerly homeless community members leading the Envision Community. Behind her is an architectural drawing of the project. (Photo by Margie O'Loughlin)

olis, would be the first community of tiny homes in the Twin Cities Metro.

Another first would be forming a strong collaboration with the health care system. Doctors also desire innovative housing models after seeing how often homeless patients turn up at hospitals with complicated, costly medical problems - many of them caused by being homeless.

Dr. William Walsh believes that homelessness is a public health crisis. A reconstructive surgeon at Hennepin Health Care and a researcher at the University of Minnesota, he serves as advisor to the Envision Community team. Dr. Walsh said, "Homeless-

ness profoundly affects a person's health, and puts enormous strain on the health care system."

He added, "There are moral and financial motivations for the health care system to get involved in ending homelessness, but with the current failure of affordable housing - we can't fix it. What's needed is an innovative new model like Envision. We can bring housing costs down without compromising the quality of life for people moving into our housing model. With a strong emphasis on building community, as well as building homes, the quality of life of life for our residents will go up."

Envision it

The Minneapolis City Council unanimously approved an intentional community cluster development ordinance last November. This allows for a new type of affordable housing for people transitioning out of homelessness. A collaborative made up of representatives from 17 different organizations, and led by members of the Twin Cities homeless community, are working together to plan what the Envision Community will be.

The Pohlad Foundation funded the construction of a pilot tiny house for Envision. It will be set up in the parking lot of Elim Church in Northeast Minneapolis later this summer. Additional funding for Envision Community has come through the Family Housing Fund and the McKnight Foundation.

Two adjacent city lots will be needed to build the project on, with easy access to public transportation and walkable amenities. The property has not yet been found.

If you want people to listen, you have to speak up

Rome Darring is also a community leader on the project. When he first got involved with Envision, he found it hard to share his story of being homeless. He said, "I've gone through a lot of changes since this started. As an advocate for the homeless, I was at the State Capitol today participating in a press conference. I was so nervous about it that I couldn't sleep at all the night before. But I've learned that if you want people to listen, you have to be willing to speak - so I made myself stand up and do it."

Visit the Envision Community website at www.hennepinhealthcare.org/envision-community/ for more information.

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