WASHINGTON — Bennie Adkins, who received the Medal of Honor for fighting off enemies and saving wounded comrades in Vietnam, died Friday from complications from the coronavirus. Adkins, who was 86, was hospitalized March 26 at the East Alabama Medical Center in his hometown of Opelika, Ala. He was admitted to the intensive care unit and put on a ventilator after experiencing respiratory failure. He died Friday according to a message posted to his foundation’s Facebook page.

Adkins is credited with killing 135 to 175 Vietnamese in a nearly four-day battle while being wounded 18 times and helping fellow soldiers to safety. For those acts, former President Barack Obama presented Adkins with the Medal of Honor in 2014.

Bennie performed so many acts of bravery we actually
Contactless payments skyrocket in place of cash

By Olga Kharif
Bloomberg

Use of contactless mobile payments — services that once struggled to catch on in the U.S. — is surging as people come to see their phones as a safer way to pay. They’re also using mobile apps tied to payments, such as Amazon Prime Now, to place delivery or pickup orders for groceries. The Treasury Department may even let people who don’t have bank accounts receive their coronavirus relief checks via mobile-payment services like Venmo.

“We shouldn’t be touching anything,” said Richard Crone, chief executive officer of mobile payment research firm Crone Consulting. He expects contactless payments to grab an additional 10% to 20% of transactions at stores and ATMs as a result of the pandemic. Person-to-person services like PayPal, Venmo and Zelle should benefit as well, Crone said.

Twenty-seven percent of U.S. small businesses have already seen an increase in customers using services like Apple Pay, according to a survey of 361 companies released in April by the Strawhecker Group and the Electronic Transacation Association. Publix Super Markets sped up its transition to contactless terminals because of COVID-19, according to the company. Since early April, consumers at all Publix stores have been able to use services like Apple Pay and Google Pay to check out.

BY OLGA KHARIF

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MONDAY IN EUROPE

Lajes, Azores 61/58

Monday, April 20, 2020

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates
European Central Bank

Discount rate 0.25%
Prime rate 3.25%
Commercial rates

Euro costs (April 20) ........................................... €0.8965

Euro (April 20) ........................................... €1.00

Dollar buys (April 20) ----------- 1.25

Brick pound (April 20) 1.32

Japenese yen (April 20) 105.00

South Korean won (April 20) 1,187.00

Contactless payments skyrocket in place of cash

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General apologizes for firefighting foam leak

By Matthew M. Burke and Aya Ichihashi
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — A Marine general apologized Friday to a vice-governor of Okinawa for an April 10 spill of 38,000 gallons of potentially toxic firefighting foam from an air station into a nearby stream and neighborhood.

The leak occurred after something triggered a fire-suppression system inside a hangar at Marine Corps Air Station Futenma and the foam traveled off base through a storm drain, the Marines said in a statement.

Okinawa Vice-Governor Kichiro Jahana toured the scene of the spill at MCAS Futenma on Friday and was briefed by Marines on what had occurred, the cleanup response and efforts to prevent future spills, according to a Marine statement.

Jahana also discussed the incident with U.S. deputy consul general Hillary Dauer and Brig. Gen. William Bowers, commander of U.S. Marine Corps Installations Pacific, according to the statement.

Jahana’s visit started with an apology from Bowers.

“We apologize that this incident has caused trouble for local residents,” the general said, according to the statement. “A senior Marine colonel is conducting a thorough investigation to determine the cause of the spill. When the investigation concludes and based upon the recommendations in the final report, we will implement measures to reduce the likelihood of similar incidents in the future.”

Of the approximately 60,000 gallons spilled, 22,000 gallons were contained on the base, an Okinawa Defense Bureau spokesman said Wednesday. The bureau represents Japan’s Ministry of Defense on the island.

Defense Ministry spokesman Shigeki Ito on Tuesday called it a “mass-leakage incident.”

“If the U.S. grants base access, we will send an investigation team to find out the cause (of the spill) then go from there,” another defense spokesman said Wednesday.

Defense Minister Taro Kono on Tuesday told reporters: “We may ask the U.S. to pay for the damage later.”

U.S. military officials in Japan have said the firefighting foam used at Futenma contains perfluorooctanesulfonic acid, or PFOS, and perfluorooctanoic acid, or PFOA.

The synthetic, fully fluorinated organic acids are also found in aircraft grease, water-repellant materials, cleaning agents and other products. They have been known to cause tumors, increases in body and organ weight and death in animals.

An unknown quantity of the foam reached Uchidomari River near MCAS Futenma, according to a letter sent Wednesday by Ginowan city Mayor Masanori Matsukawa to the commander of III Marine Expeditionary Force. Uchidomari is not a source of drinking water for the city.

“It’s a huge problem because if the leak had happened within our water supply river, we would have had to close the intake and cut the water supply to our people,” a spokesman for the Okinawa Prefectural Enterprise Bureau, which oversees water quality, said Wednesday. It’s customary for some government officials in Japan to speak by phone on the condition of anonymity.

Ginowan city firefighters responded to the Kakuza neighborhood where they saw large amounts of foam floating on Uchidomari River, a department spokesman said Friday. The foam was picked up by a strong easterly wind and covered “everything,” including homes.

The firefighters turned the foam over to the base so it could be discarded, the department spokesman said.

Bureau personnel were also dispatched to a day care center in Ginowan’s Ojana neighborhood to clean playground equipment and block off a sandbox that had been contaminated.

Ginowan’s mayor said in his letter he was angered that the Marines did not perform the off-base cleanup.

Kono, the nation’s defense minister, said he, too, wished they had taken “necessary” action and called for discussions on the future use of firefighting foam containing the compounds.

COLA changes boost some troops’ paychecks

By Caitlin Doornbos
Stars and Stripes

Some service members in Japan saw a welcome surprise in their paychecks Wednesday after the cost-of-living allowance increased across the region, a U.S. Forces Japan official said during a livestreamed town hall Thursday.

Service members at Camp Zama, Misawa Air Base, Yokota Air Base and Camp Fuji will receive about $4.50 more per day, an increase of 4 percentage points, USFJ’s senior enlisted leader Chief Master Sgt. Rick Winegartner said via USFJ’s official Facebook page. That’s about $67.50 more per 15-day pay period.

Personal stationed at Yokosuka Naval Base, Sasebo Naval Base or installations in Yokohama or on Okinawa received a boost of about $2.25 per day, Winegartner said in the livestreamed town hall hosted by American Forces Network Pacific. That’s about $33.75 more per paycheck.

Cost-of-living allowance rates reflect how expensive it is to live in an area as compared to the United States. The Defense Department uses a point system to adjust the rate, so an increase of four points means the area’s cost of living is an additional 4% higher than it would be back home.

The increase follows a decrease in cost-of-living allowances in November at many installations in Japan. Camp Zama saw a reduction of eight points; Misawa lost six points; Atsugi, Iwakuni, Sasebo and Yokota lost four points; and Okinawa lost two, according to a letter sent Wednesday by Okinawa Defense Bureau spokesman for the Okinawa Prefectural Enterprise Bureau.

“I have asked USFJ to consider this in its calculations as it applies to other installations,” said Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, in a letter last month.

Winegartner said he was glad to share positive news during the livestream, which was otherwise punctuated with questions from the public about the coronavirus.

He and other U.S. military officials across Japan have been participating in regular virtual town halls and video statements regarding coronavirus-related policy changes during the pandemic.

“Some good news — it has nothing to do with COVID — I just wanted to be able to share that so everybody can go, ‘Hey, good news comes out of these conversations, as well,’” Winegartner said in the livestream, referring to the name of the disease caused by the virus.

He did not mention whether COLA changes at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni or Naval Air Station Atsugi.

USFJ did not immediately respond Friday to a request for further information about the changes or whether other installations in Japan qualified for an increase.

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People shop at the Kaiserslautern Military Community Center’s base exchange at Ramstein Air Base, Germany. Due to the pandemic, the Army and Air Force Exchange Service is extending its return policy for shoppers through July 1.

AAFES extending its return policy

Stars and Stripes

The Army and Air Force Exchange Service is extending its return policy for items purchased in AAFES stores to accommodate customers during the coronavirus pandemic, the agency announced last week.

All purchases made since March 16 of this year are eligible for returns through July 1. The previous return policy was 90 days, except for certain products, such as jewelry, televisions and computers, which had a return policy of 15 or 30 days, depending on the item.

“While extensive preventive measures have been implemented at our stores to keep the military community safe, we understand that some shoppers may not feel comfortable going to a public place at this time,” said Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Luis Reyes, the Exchange senior enlisted advisor, in a statement. “Extending the return window gives military shoppers peace of mind.”

The extended return policy applies to items purchased at Exchange stores and not those purchased online, AAFES officials said.

news@stripes.com
Iran’s Guard acknowledges US encounter

BY AMIR VAHDAT
Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran’s paramilitary Revolutionary Guard acknowledged Sunday it had a tense encounter with U.S. warships in the Persian Gulf last week but alleged without offering evidence that American forces sparked the incident.

The incident Wednesday saw the U.S. Navy release video of small Iranian fast boats coming close to American warships as they operated in the northern Persian Gulf near Kuwait, with U.S. Army Apache helicopters.

In the Guard’s telling, its forces were on a drill and faced “the unprofessional and provocative actions of the United States and their indifference to warnings.” It said the Americans later withdrew.

The Guard released no video or evidence to support its allegation. It also accused American forces of blocking Iranian warships on April 6 and April 7.

Lt. Pete Pagano, a spokesman for the U.S. Navy’s Bahrain-based 5th Fleet, said the Navy stood by its earlier description of the incident Wednesday.

“Regarding any other interactions with Iranian ships, U.S. forces continue to remain vigilant and are trained to act in a professional manner,” Pagano told The Associated Press, echoing the Guard’s claims of other recent incidents.

The incident comes amid still-highened tensions between Iran and the U.S. despite the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Armed men boarded a Hong Kong-flagged tanker ship Tuesday off the coast of Iran near the crucial Strait of Hormuz, holding the ship for a short time near the Iranian coast before releasing it. Though Iran has not acknowledged the incident, private security firms say the Guard was behind the seizure.

In a tweet Sunday, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif kept up his criticism of President Donald Trump, claiming Iran soon would export ventilators despite facing one of the world’s worst outbreaks.

“All you need to do is stop interfering in the affairs of other nations; mine especially,” Zarif wrote. “We need ventilators, not rhetoric. We do not take advice from ANY American politician.”

By Seth Robson and Hana Kusumoto
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — A city bordering the home of U.S. Forces Japan in western Tokyo is among the few in a prefecture hard-hit by the coronavirus that has yet to report a resident infected by the disease.

The Japanese capital had 2,596 virus cases and 56 deaths by Thursday when 149 new cases were reported.

However, Fussa city, population 57,459, the area of the city immediately outside the main gate of Yokota Air Base, where USFJ is headquartered, has been coronavirus free.

On Friday traffic appeared to be normal along Route 16, the main thoroughfare passing the base. Shops were open selling everything from bicycles to televisions and crowds of mask-wearing shoppers bagged their purchases at the local mall.

It’s unclear why there are no cases in Fussa, said Miharu Harada, a city health division official. The city has provided information for people on ways to stop spreading the virus on its website and magazine and closed public facilities and canceled events, such as its popular Tanabata Festival.

“We have been calling attention to the residents extensively to stay home, wash hands and wear masks,” said USFJ commander Lt. Gen. Kevin Schneider on Wednesday declared a public health emergency for all U.S. military bases in Japan, expanding an earlier order that covered only the area in and around Tokyo.

Commanders of U.S. bases on the Korean Peninsula, which includes the Tokyo metro area and its surroundings, have declared their own public health emergencies that allow them to restrict the movements and activities, not only of troops, but also civilian employees, family members, retirees, contractors and local nationals with access to the facilities.

People living and working at Yokota have been restricted to the base or their homes but may shop for essential items and services in Fussa.

Several other towns within Tokyo, including Mizuho, Okutama, Hinode and Hinohara as well as islands administered by the city government, have also not reported virus cases, according to the Tokyo Metropolitan Government’s website.

Only a handful of cases have been announced in areas near Yokota. For example, Akishima city, population 80,624, has three cases and Tachikawa city, population 183,918, had eight cases, the website states.

The sections of central Tokyo with the highest numbers of cases are Setagaya with 243 followed by Shinjuku with 187, the website states.

By Matthew M. Burke
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Marine Forces Japan imposed more stringent off-base liberty restrictions Friday as the coronavirus continues to spread throughout the region.

The orders were announced in the evening by the III Marine Expeditionary Force on Okinawa and took effect immediately, a Marine statement said.

Marines in Japan are now barred from using non-military public and mass transportation, including taxis, and are allowed off-base only to patronize essential services, the statement said.

Those are limited to medical and veterinary appointments, grocery shopping, bill paying, purchasing gas at service stations and postal services.

Marines are no longer allowed to take annual leave or visit off-base homes unless they live there. III Marine Expeditionary Force spokesman Lt. Ryan Bruce told Stars and Stripes in an email Friday evening.

Marines are barred from eating in off-base restaurants, getting takeout or drive-thru meals, the Marine statement said. They are also barred from off-base schools and child care facilities.

Marines may run, hike and swim off-base, as long as they avoid close contact with others and maintain social distancing protocols, the statement said. They are no longer allowed to participate in activities with more than two people unless they are immediate family, Bruce added.

The guidance also applies to dependents, Defense Department civilian employees and contractors, the statement said. The government of Japan on Okinawa and the prefectural government have been notified as a courtesy.

There are approximately 30,000 Marines based throughout Japan, with the majority in Okinawa, Bruce said.

The statement came two days after U.S. Forces Japan declared a public health emergency for all U.S. military facilities in the country and a day after Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced a nationwide state of emergency.

“These changes are motivated by the continued spread of coronavirus cases throughout the region, USFJ’s declaration of a Japan-wide public health emergency, and the Government of Japan’s expanded state of emergency to encompass all of Japan,” the statement said. “These preventive measures are intended to ensure the protection of the force, our families, and our local communities, both on and off-base.”

Marine Forces Japan plans to continue “essential training and activities” while limiting the potential for exposure to coronavirus through social distancing, teleworking and other practices, it added.

“We will maintain our proficiency and readiness in support of our allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific,” the statement said. The measures will be “continually assessed” to determine if additional measures are needed or if they can be relaxed, it added.

As of Friday, Okinawa had reported 105 confirmed virus cases, the prefectural government website said. These include a girl who tested positive at the airport but was not counted in another prefecture’s tally and two U.S. airmen and a family member from Kadena Air Base.

The number of cases had doubled in a week’s time. Gov. Denny Tamaki said at a press conference Friday, according to the Okinawa Times.

Stars and Stripes reporter Aya Ichihashi contributed to this report.

Twitter: @MatthewMBurke1

Tags: coronavirus, Okinawa, liberty restrictions, marine forces japan, okinawa times
Soldiers glad to be firing guns at Grafenwoehr training area

**By Immanuel Johnson**
Stars and Stripes

GRAFENWOEHR, Germany — Several soldiers with the 41st Field Artillery Brigade smiled a little wider than usual as they fired their M240B machine guns downrange at Grafenwoehr Training Area on Friday.

Like most people, they spend more time indoors and away from others than they did before the spread of the coronavirus.

“Instead of sitting at home, we are out here moving around, seeing what everyone is doing and talking to them,” said Pfc. Jean Carlo Ciprian, a signal support system specialist.

With a few extra range safety measures, including handwashing stations, they shot up the targets just like they would have before the pandemic.

“We are practicing social distancing, [soldiers] are washing their hands and wiping down the weapons after they use them to prevent the spread of germs,” said Sgt. Kenneth Jenkins, a wheeled vehicle mechanic with the 41st FAB.

The goal was for each of the 23 soldiers to hit six of 11 targets, which qualifies them on their weapons.

The M240B is capable of firing up to 950 cyclic rounds per minute, though it’s more commonly fired at six- to 13-round bursts, according to the Army field manual on the weapon.

The other confirmed cases have been military dependents, contractors and other U.S. and South Korean civilians linked to USFK.

The command has begun requiring that anybody affiliated with USFK from overseas must be quarantined a minimum 14 days upon arrival, be monitored for symptoms and “complete two COVID-19 tests with confirmed negative results to exit quarantine.”

The overall pace of infections in South Korea has slowed, with only 22 new cases recorded on Thursday, including 14 in people arriving from abroad, according to the Korea Centers for Disease Control. South Korea reported just eight more cases Sunday, The Associated Press reported.

**VIRUS OUTBREAK**

**USFK bans US contractor for violating orders**

**By Kim Gamel**
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — An American contractor who works at Camp Humphreys has been banned from all U.S. bases in South Korea for two years for violating coronavirus quarantine orders by visiting off-base shopping facilities, the military said Friday.

It was the first such action since USFK commander Gen. Robert Abrams declared a public health emergency in late March that gave him the authority to punish civilians as well as service members who violate measures aimed at preventing the spread of the virus.

Abrams announced Friday that he is extending the public health emergency to May 23, saying it also gives him authority to repurpose facilities on installations and to take other additional measures as needed.

“It’s not really about increased risk. It’s about giving us the appropriate authorities to be able to protect the force,” he said in a community update via Facebook Live.

U.S. Forces Korea said the contractor, whose name was not released because of privacy considerations, had been instructed to go into quarantine after having direct contact with a co-worker who had tested positive for the virus.

“The individual chose to non-comply with the quarantine directive and visited the PX and the commissary,” the command said. “This individual’s disregard for USFK’s public health guidance and health protection conditions jeopardizes the safety of all USFK personnel and families.”

The ban took effect on Tuesday, according to a notice by USFK.

“The contractor has finished his quarantine, was tested and results came back negative,” USFK spokesman Col. Lee Peters said in response to a question about the contractor’s current status.

“We are confident that there was no exposure to others as both locations he visited — commissary and PX — are routinely cleaned daily,” he added.

At least six soldiers also have received non-judicial punishment under Article 15 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice for going to bars off-base or otherwise violating restrictions on nonessential movement off-base, according to the Eighth Army.

Two privates assigned to the 210th Field Artillery Brigade at Camp Casey had to forfeit pay and received extra duty and a written reprimand for traveling to Camp Humphreys without authorization on March 28, violating their unit’s sign-out policy and possessing alcohol while underage.

Two privates First class with the 210 FAB were reduced in rank, forfeited pay and received written reprimands for drinking in a bar on March 14 in Dongducheon, the city that is home to Camp Casey, near the border with North Korea.

A specialist with the same brigade received the same punishment for drinking in a bar on March 20 in Dongducheon.

A sergeant first class with the 2nd Combat Aviation Brigade had his pay cut and received a written reprimand for visiting an off-post bar in Sogongtan, the area outside Osan Air Base, on March 31.

Abrams clamped down on civilians after a contractor who works at Eighth Army headquarters tested positive after he continued to go to restaurants in the local community despite restrictions on nonessential activities off base.

That was followed by a spike in infections with a total of 10 contractors who work on Camp Humphreys testing positive. In all, USFK has had 25 coronavirus cases, including two soldiers.

USFK promised to routinely publish actions taken to enforce compliance with rules to contain the virus “to ensure our service members, civilians, contractors, employees, families and the community understand the adverse actions of not following USFK directives.”

Two civilians also were barred from Sasebo Naval Base, Japan, after security personnel found them in an off-base bar in violation of similar restrictions set by the Navy to fight the coronavirus, officials said earlier this week.

**PAGE 5**

**This individual’s disregard for USFK’s public health guidance and health protection conditions jeopardizes the safety of all.**

**US Forces Korea**

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**Service member’s wife tests positive nearly 2 weeks after return to S. Korea**

**By Kim Gamel**
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — The wife of a U.S. service member tested positive for coronavirus on Friday, nearly two weeks after she returned to South Korea from the United States, raising the total number of cases affiliated with U.S. Forces Korea to 25, the command said.

The woman, whose husband is stationed at Camp Carroll, had gone into a mandatory quarantine at her family’s off-base residence in Waegwan after arriving in South Korea on April 4, officials said.

She was tested before she was due to be released, according to new requirements, although she showed no symptoms, Gen. Robert Abrams said in a community update on Facebook Live.

The results came back positive on Friday, and she was being taken to a designated barracks at Camp Humphreys for isolation, according to the command.

Two service members had picked her up at the airport, but they wore protective gear and already had tested negative for the virus, Abrams said, adding that contact tracing was not required because she had followed procedure and been quarantined.

“It’s really a testament that our procedures and our processes are working,” he said.

Only two American soldiers have contracted the respiratory disease since an outbreak began in South Korea in late February. The other confirmed cases have been military dependents, contractors and other U.S. and South Korean civilians linked to USFK.

The ban took effect on Tuesday, according to a notice by USFK.

“The contractor has finished his quarantine, was tested and results came back negative,” USFK spokesman Col. Lee Peters said in response to a question about the contractor’s current status.

“We are confident that there was no exposure to others as both locations he visited — commissary and PX — are routinely cleaned daily,” he added.

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Virus claims veteran honored for Vietnam War heroics

WASHINGTON — Vietnam War veterans Charles Sharples and Craige Osborne were friends, neighbors and part of the gay community in California’s Coachella Valley.

They belonged to the same veterans organizations, volunteered and traveled together. They particularly enjoyed cruises. Their last cruise, which lasted from March 9 to March 15, was a one-week trip to the Mexican Riviera aboard the Norwegian Joy.

When they disembarked in Los Angeles on Monday, March 9, Sharples was weak, confused and had a fever. His friend and caretaker, Rick Tice, took him directly to Desert Regional Medical Center in Palm Springs.

Sharples, 76, died March 16 of complications from the coronavirus. Three days later, Osborne died too.

Sharples, to all who knew him, was a proud Marine — and a proud gay man.

Sharples worked most of his life at gay-friendly businesses, including management of C.B.C., a gay resort in Cathedral City, Calif. He was a leader — and one-time command — of the local AMVETS post, which has a predominantly gay membership, and he was a founding member of the Palm Springs Gay Veterans club. In 1999, he and Hernandez joined others in the club to march in the city’s annual Veterans Day parade for the first time — an action that made national news.

In 2001, Sharples helped establish the country’s first-ever memorial to honor gay veterans. The LGBTQ Veterans Memorial was dedicated in Desert Memorial Park in Cathedral City. In 2018, the state of California designated it as the state’s official memorial to gay veterans.

Sharples also advocated against Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, the U.S. military’s policy that barred openly gay and lesbian people from serving. The policy went into effect in 1993 and was repealed in 2011.

Hernandez described Coachella Valley as a “paradise for gay veterans” — and Sharples was part of what made it that way.

Sharples grew up in Pennsylvania and went to Pennsylvania State University, but he didn’t graduate. He enlisted in the Marine Corps in the mid-1960s. Hernandez said Sharples participated in the Tet Offensive, one of the largest military campaigns of the Vietnam War and one that eradicated America’s support for the conflict.

Sharples spent 10 years in the Marine Corps and was honorably discharged as a captain.

Later in life, Sharples developed Parkinson’s disease, which is known to be caused by exposure to Agent Orange, a chemical herbicide used by the U.S. military in Vietnam. It wasn’t until a few years ago that Sharples decided to file a claim with the Department of Veterans Affairs to receive monthly compensation for his disease.

Osborne, 78, was a socialite who cared for his neighbors.

Chad Shipley, a friend of Sharples and an Iraqi and Afghanistan veteran, said he will never forget Osborne’s last words to him, days before his death.

After Osborne and Sharples disembarked from their final cruise and Sharples went to the hospital, Osborne returned home. He said he was feeling fine, Shipley recalled. At the time, no one knew Sharples was suffering from the coronavirus. It was the beginning of March, and the United States hadn’t yet responded to the virus with any broad measures.

“I called him on the phone to check on him,” Shipley said. “His last words to me were, ‘Hey buddy, I love you. Never forget that your love is one of the most important things to me. Have a great night.’”

Osborne was found dead in his home March 19. An official cause was never determined, but after Sharples’ doctors confirmed he was infected with the coronavirus, their friends believe that’s what led to Osborne’s death.

Like Sharples, Osborne was highly involved in the local gay and veteran communities. He was a past leader with Disabled American Veterans and belonged to the local AMVETS post. He and Sharples went to a group brunch every Sunday at the nearby American Legion hall.

Osborne was born in Everett, Wash., and was drafted into the Army in 1966. He was trained as an infrared repairman and served in Vietnam.

Osborne had a long history in the Coachella Valley. Shipley described him as a self-sacrificing, dignified person who did as much as he could for his community. “Charles Sharples and Craige Osborne were fierce advocates who represented AMVETS remarkably in California,” AMVETS headquarters said in a statement. “On behalf of our entire organization, our hearts go out to their families and close friends. They will be deeply missed, and their continued service to veterans never forgotten.”

STARS AND STRIPES


2 friends, advocates, Vietnam War veterans die days apart

Christopher Damien

From Front Page

Virus claims veteran honored for Vietnam War heroics

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Sharples also advocated against Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, the U.S. military’s policy that barred openly gay and lesbian people from serving. The policy went into effect in 1993 and was repealed in 2011.

Hernandez described Coachella Valley as a “paradise for gay veterans” — and Sharples was part of what made it that way.

Sharples grew up in Pennsylvania and went to Pennsylvania State University, but he didn’t graduate. He enlisted in the Marine Corps in the mid-1960s. Hernandez said Sharples participated in the Tet Offensive, one of the largest military campaigns of the Vietnam War and one that eradicated America’s support for the conflict.

Sharples spent 10 years in the Marine Corps and was honorably discharged as a captain.

Later in life, Sharples developed Parkinson’s disease, which is known to be caused by exposure to Agent Orange, a chemical herbicide used by the U.S. military in Vietnam. It wasn’t until a few years ago that Sharples decided to file a claim with the Department of Veterans Affairs to receive monthly compensation for his disease.

Osborne, 78, was a socialite who cared for his neighbors.

Chad Shipley, a friend of Sharples and an Iraqi and Afghanistan veteran, said he will never forget Osborne’s last words to him, days before his death.

After Osborne and Sharples disembarked from their final cruise and Sharples went to the hospital, Osborne returned home. He said he was feeling fine, Shipley recalled. At the time, no one knew Sharples was suffering from the coronavirus. It was the beginning of March, and the United States hadn’t yet responded to the virus with any broad measures.

“I called him on the phone to check on him,” Shipley said. “His last words to me were, ‘Hey buddy, I love you. Never forget that your love is one of the most important things to me. Have a great night.’”

Osborne was found dead in his home March 19. An official cause was never determined, but after Sharples’ doctors confirmed he was infected with the coronavirus, their friends believe that’s what led to Osborne’s death.

Like Sharples, Osborne was highly involved in the local gay and veteran communities. He was a past leader with Disabled American Veterans and belonged to the local AMVETS post. He and Sharples went to a group brunch every Sunday at the nearby American Legion hall.

Osborne was born in Everett, Wash., and was drafted into the Army in 1966. He was trained as an infrared repairman and served in Vietnam.

Osborne had a long history in the Coachella Valley. Shipley described him as a self-sacrificing, dignified person who did as much as he could for his community. “Charles Sharples and Craige Osborne were fierce advocates who represented AMVETS remarkably in California,” AMVETS headquarters said in a statement. “On behalf of our entire organization, our hearts go out to their families and close friends. They will be deeply missed, and their continued service to veterans never forgotten.”
Pence: Cadets ‘inspire confidence’ in US

By Zeke Miller and Jill Colvin
Associated Press

VIRUS OUTBREAK

AIR FORCE ACADEMY, Colo. — In a symbolic nod to normalcy, Vice President Mike Pence delivered a commencement address to the U.S. Air Force Academy’s graduating class on Saturday, telling the cadets that by setting off on their mission to defend the nation they “inspire confidence that we will prevail against the invisible enemy in our time as well.”

Pence’s trip, only his second outside Washington in the last six weeks, was aimed at showing that the country is on course to gradually reopening after weeks of the coronavirus shutdown. He spoke at a scaled-down ceremony at the academy outside Colorado Springs, where hundreds of graduating cadets in blue and white dress uniforms sat eight feet apart, taking up an area nearly as large as a football field.

“I know we gather at a time of great challenge in the life of our nation,” Pence said as he began his remarks. “And while we don’t quite look like the usual graduation at the Air Force Academy, let me tell you, this is an awesome sight. And I wouldn’t be anywhere else but with the 62nd class of the Air Force Academy, the class of 2020.”

The event usually attracts a big crowd to Falcon Stadium, which has a maximum capacity of more than 46,000. President Donald Trump spoke last year. But this year, the pandemic forced the academy to close the ceremony to visitors, including friends and family of the nearly 1,000 graduates.

Still, the ceremony featured its signature dramatic flyover by the Air Force Thunderbirds, which thundered overhead as the graduates marched in the air and burst into cheers. But instead of being able to embrace their fellow graduates, the cadets remained several feet apart and then proceeded to tie on white face masks.

“You knew your graduation day would be memorable. But did you imagine that your commencement would take place in mid-April? Or that each of us would have a face mask at the ready? Or that you would march a COVID-compliant eight feet apart to the terrazzo?” asked Barbara Barrett, secretary of the Air Force.

As the ceremony began, graduates lined up outside and silently saluted the vice president’s motorcade as he arrived on a nearly empty campus. They later filed into a stadium that was absolutely silent but for the drum roll and the rustling of starched pants marching in place.

While much of the ceremony focused on the graduates, many of whom will be joining the Space Force, Pence also spoke about the government’s response to the coronavirus.

Still, he said, for “Americans looking on from around the country at this very hour, seeing you brave men and women setting off on your mission to defend this nation” would “inspire confidence that we will prevail against the invisible enemy in our time as well.”

He later greeted graduates at a distance and met with small groups of graduating cadets from his home state of Indiana, who had their temperatures taken before meeting with the vice president.

Despite starkly different visuals from previous years, Pence’s day trip was meant as a signal to the nation that the pandemic response has entered a new phase.

Pence was initially meant to speak to the academy’s graduates via recorded video.

He planned to continue his travels with a trip to Wisconsin on Tuesday.

Pressure: Countries grapple with isolation and depleting economies

FROM FRONT PAGE

as accessible a week later. Spanish authorities said that children, after six weeks of confinement, will be allowed to leave their homes beginning April 27. Spain imposed one of the strictest lockdowns in Europe, helping drive down the daily increase in confirmed infections from more than 20% to 2% for a country whose 20,000 virus deaths are only surpassed by the United States and Italy. Albania plans to let its mining and oil industries reopen Monday, along with hundreds of businesses including small retailers, food and fish factories, farmers and fishing boats.

The death toll in the U.S. is nearing 40,000 with more than 735,000 confirmed infections, and the global case count has passed 2.3 million, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University of national health reports. The actual extent of the pandemic is likely to be significantly higher due to mild infections that are missed, limited testing, problems counting the dead and some nations’ desires to underplay their outbreaks.

The International Monetary Fund expects the global economy to contract 3% this year — a far bigger loss than 2009’s 1.1% after the global financial crisis.

Still, many governments are resisting pressures to abruptly relax the coronavirus lockdowns.

“We must not let down our guard until the last confirmed patient is recovered,” South Korea’s President Moon Jae-in said Sunday.

The country, which was hit early on by the virus, announced that new infections fell Sunday to eight, from a peak of 909 on Feb. 29. But officials have warned that a “quiet spread” of the virus is possible as people relax social distancing.

British officials, who reported 888 new hospital deaths from the virus, said they’re not yet ready to ease lockdown measures. U.K. minister Michael Gove said Britain still needs to develop its testing and contact tracing program, beef up the National Health Service and make sure that infection and death rates have fallen.

It’s only when we have all those measures in place that we can be confident about relaxing some of the measures,” Gove told the BBC on Sunday, adding that pubs and restaurants “will be among the last” to leave the lockdown, which is now in place until May 7.

U.K. health experts fear that Britain, which has nearly 15,500 confirmed deaths so far, could eventually have the highest virus death toll in Europe.

France’s health agency urged the public to stick to social distancing measures that have been extended until at least May 11. “Don’t relax our efforts at the moment when confinement is bearing fruit,” the agency said.

In the U.S., supporters of President Donald Trump protested in several states Saturday, ignoring social distancing and stay-at-home orders to demand that governors end controls on public activity. They were goaded on by tweets from Trump, who called on several states with Democratic governors to “LIBERATE” and press to reopen the U.S. economy by May 1, a plan that hinges partly on more testing. Pence told NBC’s “Meet the Press” that the country has “sufficient testing today” for states to begin reopening their economies as part of the initial phases of guidelines that the White House released last week.

Texas, Indiana and some other states have announced plans to allow some retailing and other activity to resume. Florida and South Carolina have reopened beaches, with some drawing noticeable crowds.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who has criticized the federal response as inadequate, rejected pressure to reopen businesses. New York’s daily death toll fell below 500 on Saturday for the first time in two weeks, but Cuomo said hospital stays were still reporting nearly 2,000 new patients a day.

“We are not at a point where we are going to be reopening anything immediately,” Cuomo said.

In Pakistan, Prime Minister Imran Khan’s government bowed to demands by religious leaders and agreed to keep mosques open during the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan. Pakistan has been blamed for contributing to the virus’s spread by refusing to stop a gathering of tens of thousands of religious missionaries. Nearly 2,000 confirmed cases have been traced to them.

In Singapore, McDonald’s suspended operations after seven employees tested positive for the coronavirus. The company said it will keep paying more than 10,000 employees in 135 outlets during the closure, due to last through May 4.
Deaths down in New York, but officials urge continued vigilance

By Matthew Perrone and Michelle R. Smith

WASHINGTON — The United States is struggling to test enough people to track and control the coronavirus spread, a crucial first step to reopening parts of the economy, which President Donald Trump is pushing to do by May 1.

Trump on Thursday released a plan to ease business restrictions that hinges on a downward trajectory of positive tests. But far short of a month after he declared, “Anybody who wants a test, can get a test,” the reality has been different. People report being unable to get tested. Labs and public officials have said that supply shortages have made it impossible to meet the testing levels experts have said is necessary to keep the virus at bay.

“There are places that have enough test swabs, but not enough workers to administer them. There are places that are limiting tests due to the daily number of violations,” the mayor said. “We need to increase testing to the number of tests that are needed to help the city deal with the coronavirus threat.”

Trump’s plan envisions setting up “sentinel surveillance sites” that would screen people without symptoms in locations that serve older people or minority populations. Experts have said that testing would have to increase as much as threefold to be effective.

The plan pushes responsibility for testing up to $1,000, the mayor said. The city will also receive $150 if it determined she did not fit its test criteria.

“I feel like medical workers, or even people on the front line, they should have some kind of priority,” said Rodriguez.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo and 16 other governors have organized three separate clusters of states committed to working together on reopening their economies.

By Geoff Mulvihill

President Donald Trump, in a roller-coaster week of reversals and contradictions, told governors to “call your own shots” on lifting stay-at-home orders once the coronavirus threat subsides. But then he took to Twitter to push some to reopen their economies quickly and define their job to ramp up testing.

“This is mayhem,” New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo said Friday. “We need a coordinated approach between the federal government and the states.”

In the absence of one, Cuomo and 16 other governors representing half the nation’s population have organized three separate clusters of states each committed to working together on the details of relaunching businesses, schools and events while avoiding a resurgence of infections.

The pact has formed among states that do not have political alliances, nor geographic proximity, with each other or with the federal government, which some states say, “Oh, the states are responsible for testing,” Cuomo said. “This is mayhem.”

Cuomo, who said the states are responsible for testing, pointed to the May 1 reopen date as a major challenge to keep the outbreak moving in the right direction.

“We do not want to see it the second time around,” he said.

The first step to reopening will be a gradual approach that will allow businesses to reopen in a phased manner.

The San Luis Obispo County health department can only test about 50 people a day, and a spokeswoman said that those tests are reserved for people who are hospitalized, first responders and those who have had contact with people who tested positive. Rodriguez didn’t qualify. Another clinic told her that she might have to pay $150 if it determined she did not fit its test criteria.

“We need to be aggressive in testing, but also make sure we have enough tests,” the mayor said.

Mayors of the state’s 20 biggest cities have formed members of a regional task force that includes all 20 mayors.

“I think it’s important to have a regional approach to testing, which is why we’re working on more testing in New York City,” the mayor said.

Trump said that the federal government is not going to get done what the states need to get done.

David Postman, chief of staff for Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, said that cooperating with California and Oregon — which also coordinate — might be impossible.

“Nobody in the administration of the governor — would probably happen regardless of the Trump administration’s approach,” Inslee said.

While there are key differences between the states, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown said that people “work in Oregon and live in Washington and obviously the reverse. And the same is true with California.” She also said that it would be “extremely useful” to coordinate instead of compete for protective equipment.

“The state and local officials, as well as lab managers, have said that they cannot expand testing until there are more supplies.”

Gov. Andrew Cuomo said Friday that there was a need for more testing.

“More than a month after he declared, ‘Anybody who wants a test, can get a test,’ the reality has been different,” the mayor said.

People report being unable to get tested. Labs and public officials have said that supply shortages have made it impossible to meet the testing levels experts have said is necessary to keep the virus at bay.

“The federal government cannot wipe their hands of this and say ‘Hi, the states are responsible for testing,’” Cuomo said Friday as he complained of a shortage of testing chemicals manufactured in China. “I don’t do international supply chain.”

Jennifer Rodriguez, a pharmacy technician at a major retail chain in California, said that she was sent home by her employer after couponing with symptoms. Her company would not test her, and she spent hours on the phone trying to find a place that would, she said.

The number of New York Police Department officers who have tested positive for the coronavirus, police officials said.

“The number of New York Police Department officers calling out sick is also declining,” the mayor said.

The nation’s largest police department reported that 5,324 uniformed members — about 15% of the force — were out sick Saturday. That’s down from a high of 7,155 officers — nearly 20% of the force — on April 9.

So far, more than 2,000 members of the NYPD have returned to work full time after recovering from a positive test for the coronavirus, police officials said.
Racial toll grows starker as more data emerges

By Kat Stafford, Meghan Hoyt and Aaron Morrison
Associated Press

As a clearer picture emerges of COVID-19’s decidedly deadly toll on black Americans, leaders are demanding a reckoning of the systemic policies they said have made many African Americans far more vulnerable to the virus, including inequity in access to health care and economic opportunity.

A growing chorus of medical professionals, activists and political figures is pressuring the federal government to release comprehensive racial demographic data of the country’s virus victims, but also to outline clear strategies to blunt the devastation on African Americans and other communities of color.

On Friday, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released its first breakdown of COVID-19 case data by race, showing that 40% of patients whose race was known were black. The federal data was missing racial information for 75% of all cases, however, and did not include any demographic breakdown of deaths.

The latest Associated Press analysis of available state and local data shows that nearly one-third of those who have died are African American, with black people representing about 14% of the population in the areas covered in the analysis.

Roughly half the states, representing less than a fifth of the nation’s coronavirus cases, have yet to release demographic data on fatalities. In states that have, about a quarter of the death records are missing racial details.

Health conditions that exist at higher rates among black communities — obesity, diabetes and asthma — make African Americans more vulnerable to the virus. They are also more likely to be uninsured, and often report that medical professionals take their ailments less seriously when they seek treatment.

“It’s America’s unfinished business — we’re free, but not equal,” civil rights leader Rev. Jesse Jackson told the AP. “There’s a reality check that has been brought by the coronavirus, that exposes the weakness and the opportunity.”

Jackson’s Rainbow PUSH Coalition and the National Medical Association, a group representing African American physicians and patients, released a joint public health advisory calling for better COVID-19 testing and treatment data.

Jackson also expressed support for a national commission to study the black COVID-19 toll modeled after the Kerner Commission, and made policy recommendations to prevent future unrest.

Daniel Dawes, director of Morehouse College’s School of Medicine’s Satcher Health Leadership Institute, said that America’s history of segregation and political determinants are the racial health disparities that exist today.

“If we do not take an appreciation for the historical context and the political determinants, then we’re only merely going to nibble around the edges of the problem of inequities,” he said.

The release of demographic data for the country’s coronavirus victims remains a priority for many civil rights and public health advocates, who have said that the numbers are needed to address disparities in the national response to the pandemic.

The AP analysis, based on data through Thursday, found that of the more than 21,500 victims whose demographic data was known and disclosed by officials, more than 6,350 were black, a rate of nearly 30%. African Americans account for 14.2% of the 241 million people who live in the areas covered by the analysis, which encompasses 24 states and the cities of Washington, Houston, Memphis, Pittsburgh and Philadelphia — places where statewide data was unavailable.

In some areas, Native American communities also have been hit hard. In New Mexico, Native Americans account for nearly 37% of the state’s 1,284 cases and about 11% of the state’s population. Of the 112 deaths where race is known in Arizona, 30 were Native Americans.

After Democratic lawmakers introduced legislation to try to compel federal health officials to post daily data breaking down cases and deaths by race, ethnicity and other demographics, the CDC released only caseload data that — similar to the AP’s analysis of deaths — show that 30% of 111,636 infected patients whose race is known were black.

African American patients in the 45-to-64 and 65-to-74 age groups represented an even larger share of the national caseload.

The lawmakers sent a letter last month to Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar urging federal release of the demographic data. And Joe Biden, the former vice president and presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, also called for its release.

Meanwhile, some black leaders have described the Trump administration’s response to COVID-19 as inadequate, after what they said was a hastily organized call with Vice President Mike Pence and CDC Director Robert Redfield.

Mistrust runs deep among residents in many communities. St. Louis resident Randy Barnes is grappling not just with the emotional toll of losing his brother to the coronavirus, but also with the feeling that his brother’s case was not taken seriously.

Barnes said that the hospital where his brother sought treatment initially sent him home without testing him and suggested he self-quarantine for 14 days. Five days later, his brother was back in the hospital, where he was placed on a ventilator for two weeks. He died April 13. Barnes’ brother and his wife were also caring for an 88-year-old man in the same apartment, who died from the virus around the same time.

“Those people are not being tested,” Barnes said. “They’re not being cared for.”

Puerto Rico under scrutiny as youngest virus patient dies

By Danica Coto
Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico — Puerto Ricans are becoming increasingly disgruntled with how the government is handling the COVID-19 crisis as more details emerge, including those about the death a 29-year-old man who became the U.S. territory’s youngest virus victim after his father said that he wasn’t tested the first two times he sought help at an emergency room.

The allegation was made as the government announced Saturday that a private company took responsibility for disconnecting a refrigerated trailer packed with food that was supposed to be distributed to those in need amid a two-month lockdown to curb coronavirus cases, causing chicken, vegetables, fruits and other items to spoil.

“I’m completely unacceptable,” said Public Safety Director Pedro Janer.

He said that while the government was being praised for its response, the incident under investigation after the company said that it got instructions to disconnect the trailer from an employee of a local emergency management office.

The food was left over from when Puerto Rico was hit with a series of strong earthquakes in recent months that killed one person and caused millions of dollars in damage along the island’s southern coast. Officials did not provide the estimated cost of the food lost.

Meanwhile, newly appointed Health Secretary Lorenzo Gonzalez acknowledged during Saturday’s press conference that the island’s virus-related data is not entirely accurate because some positive cases might have been counted twice, and that the government is working to improve it.

“It’s imperfect data, but we’re going to use it … because it’s the one we have,” he said.

Gonzalez said that he hopes to eventually make missing data available, including the number of people who have recuperated from COVID-19.

Puerto Rico has reported more than 1,100 confirmed cases and more than 1,700 pending test results, with a total of 10,900 tested on an island of 3.2 million, the lowest per capita testing rate compared with any U.S. state.

At least 60 deaths have been reported, including that of a 29-year-old man whose father identified him as Joshua James Sanchez and said that he had no chronic health conditions. The father, Luis Angel Sanchez, accused health workers in a social media post of testing and admitting his son only after he went into respiratory failure.

“I don’t wish this disastrous experience on anybody,” he said.

Sanchez did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

As a growing number of Puerto Ricans demand more widespread testing, among other things, they have organized drive-by protests and bang on pots every night to signal their displeasure with the administration of Gov. Wanda Vazquez, who has been praised, however, for placing the island on lockdown since March 15.

The lockdown is scheduled to expire on May 3, but Gonzalez said that he will recommend it be extended to at least June 1 since the peak of cases isn’t expected until early May.

Licensed practical nurse Lenora Shepard, left, removes a protective gown next to registered medical assistant Lausha Plummer after working at a drive-thru COVID-19 testing site in St. Louis. The latest AP analysis shows that nearly one-third of those who have died from the virus are African American.
Trump’s foreign aid disdains virus originated there

By Matthew Lee
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump’s well-known disdain for foreign aid is colliding with the imperatives of fighting the coronavirus pandemic, as his administration boasts about America’s generosity for countries in dire need while still generating confusion and anger on the global stage.

The United States has committed more than $500 million in anti-virus aid for foreign countries since January — a sign that some administration officials recognize Trump’s “America First” policy can’t fully protect Americans from a highly infectious disease that knows no borders. They also know that if the U.S. doesn’t help, archrivals like China and Russia will gladly step in to fill the void, in part to advance their narrative that the U.S. is in decline.

But the U.S.-led Western leadership is over.

For instance, two years after slashing virtually all U.S. aid to the Palestinian territories, the administration announced Thursday that it would provide $5 million in assistance to Palestinian medical centers and households for “immediate, life-saving needs in combating COVID-19.”

In just the past several weeks, however, the administration has sent conflicting messages about its global outreach and reversed its longstanding contributions to the very organization tasked with battling the pandemic and reversing the decisions to provide critical equipment like personal protective gear and ventilators to other countries in order to meet domestic needs.

It has left aid recipients uncertain about whether grant money from the U.S. can be used to buy those same items, even if they weren’t intended for distribution in the first place.

The latest in the jarring moves came Tuesday when Trump announced the suspension of U.S. funding for the World Health Organization pending a review of whether the agency bowed to Chinese demands to downplay the threat of the pandemic in its early stages for political purposes.

Just two weeks earlier, the State Department had hailed both WHO and the support U.S. provided for it.

“WHO is coordinating the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic and is on the ground in 149 countries around the world,” it said in a March 31 fact sheet touting America’s generosity. “This broad-based effort would not be possible without U.S. support.”

An update to that fact sheet, released Thursday, does not mention WHO.

Trump’s funding suspension decision was widely denounced.

“Abandoning this critical body will only put more lives at risk,” said Michelle Nunn, head of the relief agency CARE USA, one of many humanitarian groups to condemn it. “The Trump administration’s decision to halt funding to the WHO during a global pandemic is dangerous, self-defeating and short-sighted.”

Just six days before Trump’s announcement, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had announced that the U.S. would almost double its overseas virus aid to nearly $500 million since January. He referred to the “unmatched generosity of the American people” and said that “the United States has continued to lead the world’s public health and humanitarian response to the COVID-19 pandemic.”

“Pandemics do not respect national borders,” he said April 8. “Through decades of U.S. global leadership in health and humanitarian assistance, we know that smart and strategic investments have proven critical to protecting the homeland. As history proves, we can fight pandemics at home and help other nations contain them.”

Pompeo, however, also introduced a caveat to American aid. He said aid assistance to 64 nations identified as most at-risk would not include personal protective equipment and other essential supplies.

“We will keep all critical medical items in the United States until the demand at home is met,” he said.

An April 10 directive from the Federal Emergency Management Agency stated that any export of personal protective gear made in the U.S. or by U.S. companies abroad has left many in government and aid organizations confused about what American assistance can be used to buy once it arrives at its destination.

Some groups fear that the administration may use that directive or a corollary to ban them from sending funds to purchase certain types of gloves, face masks and other respirators, according to relief agency officials.

One group, Partners in Health, a Massachusetts-based non-governmental group that runs medical facilities, said it had been advised through “official channels” not to apply for funding that could be used to purchase equipment to battle COVID-19 because it could be delayed by confusion over whether the U.S. would finance such purchases.

Official at Wuhan lab denies virus originated there

By Jessica Schlattenbeck
New York Daily News

A laboratory in the Chinese city of Wuhan, stronghold away from the wet market where officials said that the coronavirus first emerged, has denied accusations the disease originated at the institute before it spread and infected millions worldwide.

Yuan Zhanshu, deputy director of the Wuhan Institute of Virology, in an interview with Chinese state broadcaster CGTN, dismissed the claims as a “conspiracy theory” designed to “confuse” people. Scientists at the facility do research on coronaviruses that originate in bats, which has prompted speculation regarding the Wuhan lab in recent weeks.

His comments mark the first time anyone from the institute has discussed the global outbreak since it first emerged in China at the end of last year.

“As people who carry out virus study, we clearly know what kind of research is going on in the institute and how the institute manages viruses and samples,” Yuan said. “As we said early on, there is no way this virus came from us.”

Yuan, a microbiology and biotechnology expert who trained in France, Denmark and the United States, also noted that a man-made coronavirus resembling the one rippling across the globe is beyond the scope of human intelligence.

The Chinese government has long denied that the lab was to blame and almost immediately pointed to a wet market in the city of Wuhan as the virus source. But there have been several questions raised about that theory since the illness has killed more than 156,000 people worldwide.

In recent weeks, President Donald Trump has placed blame on China and its lack of transparency at the start of the outbreak. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo also seemed to acknowledge theories about the lab in Wuhan.

“We know there is the Wuhan Institute of Virology a couple miles away from where the wet market was,” Pompeo told Fox News. “There is still lots to learn. The United States government is working diligently to figure it out.”

Eastern Christians mark Easter in shuttered Jerusalem church

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — A handful of Eastern Orthodox priests held mass for the Christian holiday of Easter on Sunday in an empty Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem due to restrictions in place to prevent the spread of the new coronavirus.

Eastern Christian rites mark Easter, the day Christians believe Jesus was resurrected after his crucifixion, a week after the Catholic calendar.

Ordinarily, the church would be filled with faithful and tourists, but travel restrictions imposed by Israel to prevent the spread of the coronavirus have prevented the arrival of pilgrims to Jerusalem for the springtime holiday and limited the gathering of worshipers at the church.

Easter mass was performed by a small group of clergy at the Holy Sepulcher, where many Christians believe that Jesus was entombed. The square outside was empty and the church’s large wooden doors barred shut, but a few individual worshipers came to pray outside.

Israel has recorded over 13,000 COVID-19 cases and over 170 deaths.

A day earlier, a small group of clerics at the church celebrated the ancient Holy Fire ceremony, commonly draws enormous crowds as a flame is transferred to faithful around the globe from within a chamber where Christians believe that Jesus was buried and rose from the dead.

In Egypt, Pope Tawadros II, the spiritual leader of the country’s Coptic Orthodox Christians, held Easter services in an empty monastery in the desert amid coronavirus restrictions that kept faithful from gathering at churches and monasteries across the country.

The services were held at the Monastery of Saint Pishoy, in a desert valley west of Cairo known as Wadi Natrun. A few clergymen attended the services, which was aired on a Coptic Orthodox television station. The clerics were seen practicing social distancing during the prayers.

The Coptic Orthodox Church, one of the world’s oldest Christian communities, decided earlier this month to suspend Easter prayers and celebrations at churches and monasteries because of the spread of the highly infectious virus.

Christians constitute about 10% of Egypt’s over 100 million predominantly Muslim population.

Egypt, the Arab world’s most populous country, has 3,032 cases including 224 deaths.
Germany’s tradition-laden breweries struggle to survive during pandemic

BY CHRISTOPHE NOELTING AND DAVID MCHUGH

WERNECKE, Germany — The Werneck Brewery has survived a lot: world wars, economic crises and decades of declining beer consumption. But after 400 years in existence, it has finally met a challenge it can’t overcome: the coronavirus outbreak.

The brewery, which traces its history to 1617 and has been owned by the same family since 1861, is closing for good. Taking with it 15 full-time jobs and more part-time positions. Also gone is a chunk of local history and tradition in Werneck, a town of 10,000 people in the brewery-rich southern state of Bavaria.

German brewers fear its demise is the leading edge of more closures as the virus outbreak threatens the existence of the country’s many local producers of the national beverage — community institutions, often family owned for generations, whose buildings and affiliated taverns are regional landmarks in a country where the hometown brew is often a sentimental favorite despite competition from national brands.

Hardest hit are smaller breweries like the one in Werneck that depend on supplying kegs to local taverns and events such as local festivals. Restaurants are closed and the government says mass gatherings will not resume until Sept. 1 at the earliest — and even then it may take years before they rebound to levels seen before the virus outbreak.

Retail sales are providing some support as people drink at home. Breweries are trying things like drive-through sales and even shipping beer and glasses to customers so they can join an online tasting.

But for many months without income may be more than they can handle.

Family member and brewery manager Christine Lang said the decision to close came with “many tears.” The beer market was already hard fought with tough price competition, she said. Then came the virus, and the restaurant customers the brewery depended on were suddenly closed, with no clarity on when they might open.

“No one knows how long the coronavirus will last, when there will be an improvement, and whether the restaurants will open again at all,” she said. “And in our business, it’s the case that a beer that isn’t drunk today won’t be consumed twice in a couple of months, the sales revenue is gone, lost.”

According to a survey by the national brewers association some 85% of breweries say they are putting workers on short hours, taking advantage of a government program that pays up to 60% of net salaries during business interruptions. The program is aimed at getting companies through a crisis, keeping workers from being laid off, and supporting consumer spending in the economy. But other programs such as credits and delays in collecting taxes are less useful, brewers say. Credits mean taking on new debt for the future, and the taxes will eventually have to be paid as well.

Holger Eichele, secretary-general of the German Brewers Association, said that “many breweries will not survive this crisis, that is already becoming clear.”

Trudeau: US-Canada border to remain shut

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Saturday that Canada and the United States had agreed to keep their border closed for all nonessential travel for another 30 days.

“Canada and the United States have agreed to extend by another 30 days the border measures that are currently in place,” Trudeau said during televised remarks.

He said the move will “keep people on both sides of the border safe.”

The two countries temporarily closed their border on March 18.

The U.S. has imposed a range of measures to limit the entrance of foreign nationals from areas hit hard by the coronavirus, including China and Europe.

The majority of Canadians live in areas close to the 5,500-mile U.S. border, and communities on both sides of the frontier maintain close links.

The U.S. and Canada have daily trade worth about $2 billion. U.S. goods and services trade with Canada totaled an estimated $718.5 billion in 2018, according to U.S. trade authorities.

The Costa Deliziosa, shown in 2015, began an around-the-world cruise before the globe was gripped by the coronavirus pandemic.

n passengers are finally approaching their odyssey’s end after 15 weeks at sea.

Cruise that began before outbreak nears end of trip

Associated Press

ROME — Passengers on a luxury liner’s around-the-world cruise, begun before the globe was gripped by the coronavirus pandemic, are finally approaching the end of their odyssey after 15 weeks at sea.

Their ship, the Costa Deliziosa, heads to ports in Spain and Italy, two of the countries most devastated by the coronavirus outbreak.

Costa Crociere, an Italian cruise company, said Saturday that the Deliziosa, which set sail from Venice in early January with 1,831 passengers, has reached the western Mediterranean, with no cases of COVID-19 aboard.

The Deliziosa, a nearly 1,000-foot vessel, will disembark 168 Spanish passengers early next week at the port of Barcelona, Spain, the company said. Then the Deliziosa will head to its final destination, Genoa, Italy, where it is expected to disembark the remaining passengers, Italians and those of other nationalities, Wednesday.

A company spokesman said a passenger left the ship earlier in the week in Marsala, Sicily, for health issues and had a COVID-19 test, which was negative.

Being on the liner for weeks during the pandemic was not surreal, it was incredible, said passenger Carlos Paya, who lives in Valencia, Spain, and is sailing with his wife. He added that they have family members in Spain.

The news that was arriving from home was causing us all a lot of worry and grief, he told The Associated Press by text message from home.

Other passengers, on the other hand, given their old age, wanted to stay on board knowing that the boat was safe and secure.

French authorities had rebuffed a request by Costa for permission to disembark several hundred passengers from France and nearby countries at Marseilles.

“The health situation on board the ships, with 1,814 guests and 986 members of the crew, doesn’t present any problem for public health and no case of COVID-19,” Costa’s statement said.

The Deliziosa was originally due to return to Venice on April 26. After the U.N. World Health Organization pandemic alert in March, the ship had just made a port call in Freemantle, western Australia, made only technical and refueling stops, before the journey back toward the Mediterranean, which took it through the Suez Canal, according to the company.

Passenger Jean-Pierre Escarras, from Marseille, shot a video of their cabin that their daughters shared on social networks, in which he says: “This is our place of confinement. We are lucky to have a window.”

The couple said that after a stop in Sydney, the ship’s activities were “reduced or sometimes canceled. We haven’t been able to get out on land since March 14 — that’s 34 days.”

The passengers said that ports in Oman, along the Suez Canal, as well as in the Seychelles and Indian Ocean ports, refused to let the ship dock.
Video tribute honors Oklahoma bombing victims

By Sean Murphy

NEW ORLEANS — Ten years after an oil rig blowout killed 11 workers and unleashed an environmental nightmare in the Gulf of Mexico, companies are drilling in deeper and deeper waters, where payoffs can be huge but risks are greater than ever.

Industry leaders and government officials say they're determined to prevent a repeat of BP's Deepwater Horizon disaster, which spilled 134 million gallons of oil that fouled beaches from Louisiana to Florida, killed hundreds of thousands of marine animals, and devastated the tourist economy.

Yet safety rules adopted in the spill's aftermath have been eased as part of President Donald Trump's drive to boost U.S. economy.

Kari Watkins, the director of the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, said this year's social distancing restrictions are necessary but unfortunate, as survivors and victims' family members often only see each other this one time each year.

"It's just a nice time for them to come and be together," she said.

"They'll miss that, but they'll have another time when it's safe to gather and we'll come back together and do something, whenever that day is."

Holt said the 25th anniversary of the attack is particularly notable in that it marks a transition of the event from one of personal experience to historical event.

"The march of time is relentless, and every year that passes, fewer and fewer people have a direct connection to it," Holt said.

"The 25th is another time for us here in Oklahoma City to refocus on what makes the event and the site relevant in the decades to come."

For Holt, that means spreading the message that political violence is never the answer.

"People in Oklahoma City sort of have a special obligation to stand for the idea that we have much more in common than we have different," he said.

Associated Press

Warmest oceans on record could set off a year of extreme weather

By Brian K. Sullivan

BOSTON — The world's seas are simmering, with record high temperatures spurring worry among forecasters that the global warming effect may generate a chaotic year of extreme weather ahead.

Parts of the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans all hit the record books for warmth last month, according to the U.S. National Centers for Environmental Information. The high temperatures could offer clues on the ferocity of the Atlantic hurricane season, the eruption of wildfires from the Amazon region to Australia, and whether the record heat and severe thunderstorms rivaling the southern U.S. will continue.

In the Gulf of Mexico, where offshore drilling accounts for about 17% of U.S. oil output, water temperatures were 76.3 degrees Fahrenheit, 2.7 degrees above the long-term average, said Phil Klotzbach at Colorado State University. If Gulf waters stay warm, it could be the fuel that intensifies any storm that comes that way, Klotzbach said.

"The entire tropical ocean is above average," said Michelle L'Heureux, a forecaster at the U.S. Climate Prediction Center. "And there is a global warming component to that. It is really amazing when you look at all the tropical oceans and see how warm they are."

The record warm water in the Gulf of Mexico spilled over into every coastal community along the shoreline with all-time high temperatures on land, said Deke Arndt, chief of the monitoring section at the National Centers for Environmental Information in Asheville, N.C.

In South Florida, temperatures this year can also be traced to a string of heat records. Miami reached 93 degrees Fahrenheit, a new high for the season, on April 18, 2020. The prior record was 92 degrees on April 20, 2005.

Worldwide, sea temperatures were 1.49 degrees Fahrenheit above average in March. That's the second highest level recorded since 1880 for the month of March, according to U.S. data. In 2016, temperatures were 1.55 degrees above average.

The first of Colorado State's 2020 storm reports, led by Klotzbach, forecast this year that eight hurricanes could spin out of the Atlantic with an above-average chance at least one will make landfall in the U.S. during the six-month season starting June 1. The U.S. is set to issue its hurricane forecast next month.

The searing global temperatures this year can also be traced back to intense climate systems around the Arctic that bottled up much of that region's cold, preventing it from spilling south into temperate regions. Combined with global warming, this was a one-two punch for sea temperatures that's brought them to historic highs.

By Peter Kerwineo

NEW ORLEANS — Ten years after an oil rig blowout killed 11 workers and unleashed an environmental nightmare in the Gulf of Mexico, companies are drilling in deeper and deeper waters, where payoffs can be huge but risks are greater than ever.

Industry leaders and government officials say they're determined to prevent a repeat of BP's Deepwater Horizon disaster, which spilled 134 million gallons of oil that fouled beaches from Louisiana to Florida, killed hundreds of thousands of marine animals, and devastated the tourist economy.

Yet safety rules adopted in the spill's aftermath have been eased as part of President Donald Trump's drive to boost U.S. production. And government data reviewed by the Associated Press shows the number of safety inspection visits has declined in recent years, although officials say checks of electronic records, safety systems and individual oil rig components have increased.

Today, companies are increasingly reliant on production from deeper and inherently more dangerous oil reserves, where drill crews grapple with ultra-high pressures and oil temperatures that can top 350 degrees.

After the spill, oil giants created the Marine Well Containment Co., which has equipment and vessels ready to respond if another major spill occurs.

As wells close to shore run dry, the average drilling depth in deeper waters steadily increased, from about 3,500 feet beneath the surface in 1999 to more than 4,600 feet in 2019, according to AP analysis of data from the U.S. Interior Department's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management.

Drilling deeper makes wells sites harder to reach in a blowout or other accident.

"In the past year, the industry began producing crude from ultra-high pressure reserves in the Gulf, where well pressures can top 20,000 pounds per square inch, much more than Deepwater Horizon," said Kari Watkins, the director of the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, said this year's social distancing restrictions are necessary but unfortunate, as survivors and victims' family members often only see each other this one time each year.

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On April 19, 1999, 11 workers were killed in the explosion aboard the Offshore Horizon oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico. The explosion sparked a massive oil spill, creating an environmental disaster.

Lynne Gist sits next to her sister's memorial in the Field of Empty Chairs on Wednesday at the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum in Oklahoma City. The city canceled its observance of the 25th anniversary since the Oklahoma City bombing because of coronavirus restrictions.

Sue Ogrocki/AP
UN experts: Blacklist 14 ships for violating North Korea sanctions

Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS — U.N. experts have recommended blacklist 14 vessels for violating sanctions against North Korea in a report that accuses the country of increasing illegal coal exports, imports of petroleum products and continuing with cyber attacks on financial institutions and cryptocurrency exchanges to gain illicit revenue.

The 267-page report, obtained Saturday by The Associated Press, also accused North Korea of importing luxury vehicles, watches and liquor and other sanctioned items including robotic watches and liquor and other items of importing luxury vehicles, watches and liquor and other sanctioned items including robotic watches and liquor and other items.

The panel made 39 recommendations to the Security Council, including on the blacklisting of 14 vessels.

It said one vessel is registered in Sierra Leone and six were previously registered in the West African nation. Two are North Korean, one is Chinese, one Vietnamese, one was formerly registered in Togo, one was formerly registered in St. Kitts and Nevis, and the flag of one is unknown.

China has been North Korea’s largest trading partner and has been considered critical to enforcing U.N. sanctions.

US condemns Hong Kong’s arrests of democracy activists

BY ZEN SOO
Associated Press

HONG KONG — The United States condemned the arrests of at least 14 veteran pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong on charges of joining massive anti-government protests last year, saying the police action jeopardizes a high degree of autonomy guaranteed to the southern Chinese city.

The sweeping crackdown amid a coronavirus pandemic is based on charges of unlawful assembly stemming from huge rallies against proposed China extradition legislation that exposed deep divisions between democracy-minded Hong Kongers and the Communist Party-ruled central government in Beijing.

The bill — which would have allowed the residents of the semi-autonomous Chinese territory to be sent to the mainland to stand trial — has been withdrawn, but the protests continued for more than seven months, centered around demands for voting rights and an independent inquiry into police conduct.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in a statement condemned the arrests.

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China has been North Korea’s largest trading partner and has been considered critical to enforcing U.N. sanctions.

The full report by the panel of experts monitoring the sanctions against North Korea in Hong Kong said police were enforcing the law against those suspected of organizing and participating in unauthorized assemblies, and foreign countries have no right to interfere, China’s official Xinhua News Agency reported. “It is completely wrong that the U.K. Foreign Office spokes-person has distorted the truth by painting unauthorized assemblies as ‘peaceful protests,’ in a bid to whitewash, condone and exonerate the anti-China troublemakers in Hong Kong,” the statement said.

Hong Kong authorities had denied permission for most of the rallies and police increasingly used tear gas and pepper spray against demonstrators, arresting hundreds.

Eastern Congo flooding kills at least 25

Associated Press

BENI, Congo — About 25 people have been killed by flooding in eastern Congo, a local official said Saturday.

The administrator of Uvira territory in South Kivu province, Kiza Muhato, told The Associated Press that the search continued for bodies.

Muhato said about 45 other people were injured and about 3,500 homes were destroyed when the Mulongwe river flooded in Uvira city Friday. The administrator called for urgent help from aid groups and volunteers.

Mathias Gillmann, spokesman for the U.N. mission in Congo, told the AP they were working with local authorities to provide support, particularly drinking water.

An engineering team has been working since Friday to repair two destroyed bridges so that humanitarian aid can be delivered.

Former pro-democracy lawmaker Martin Lee, 81, right, leaves a police station Saturday in Hong Kong. Hong Kong police arrested at least 14 pro-democracy lawmakers and activists on Saturday on charges of joining unlawful protests last year.

The Office of the Commissioner of the Chinese Foreign Ministry in Hong Kong said police were enforcing the law against those suspected of organizing and participating in unauthorized assemblies, and foreign countries have no right to interfere, China’s official Xinhua News Agency reported. “It is completely wrong that the U.K. Foreign Office spokes-person has distorted the truth by painting unauthorized assemblies as ‘peaceful protests,’ in a bid to whitewash, condone and exonerate the anti-China troublemakers in Hong Kong,” the statement said.

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PARIS — Notre Dame Cathedral stands crippled and isolated, locked in a dangerous web of warped metal scaffolding one year after a devastating fire gutted its interior, toppled its famous spire and horrified the world.

Some of the 40,000 bars — erected for an earlier renovation project — melted in the intense blaze on April 15, 2019. The unstable scaffolding now endangers the Gothic jewel that for many embodies the soul of France.

The restoration of the landmark from the 12th and 13th centuries has been halted and the workers sent home because of France’s coronavirus lockdown that began March 17, thwarting plans to start removing the 250 tons of scaffolding.

So even Notre Dame has been left in isolation by the pandemic that has affected so many people across France.

But its 13-ton bell in the south tower, named Emmanuel, sounded at 8 p.m. Wednesday: A man wearing a mask and white protective clothing pulled a rope attached to its enormous clapper. The sound of the bell joined the nightly applause from balconies to honor overstretched health workers.

On Good Friday, Paris Archbishop Michel Aupetit led an exceptional but tiny gathering inside the church, at the foot of the huge golden cross that remains intact.

"Today, we stand in this half-fallen cathedral to say that life is still here," Aupetit said in the televised ceremony.

The gathering in the fragile church was meant to raise the spirits of a nation in distress.

"The message of hope is especially important for our compatriots at a time when we are particularly affected by the coronavirus, which is sowing anguish and death," the archbishop told reporters.

There was no Easter service and no formal plans to mark the anniversary of the fire. But the musicians of Notre Dame have created a virtual homage to their beloved cathedral with a performance from their homes of an extract of J.S. Bach’s "St. John Passion."

"As long as we have this scaffolding around, there’s still sort of a 50% chance that more damage can be (caused) to the cathedral," said Notre Dame chaplain Brice de Malherbe, who last year was evacuated from his home next door as flames engulfed the roof.

French President Emmanuel Macron reiterated Wednesday his desire to see the cathedral reopen its giant doors in time for the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris.

"We will do everything to keep this deadline," he said in a tweeted video, thanking firefighters and rescue workers for extinguishing the blaze and saving lives.

"Notre Dame is a symbol of our resilience, our capacity to overcome challenges and stand aright," Macron said.

But progress has been delayed by setbacks, from the discovery of toxic dust from the melted lead roof and spire to the health and safety demands of the pandemic.

For one fervent devotee of Notre Dame, the barricades, which replaced a smaller barrier, symbolize her loss, and the virus spreading across France and the world.

"Notre Dame is confined. I couldn’t throw a bouquet of flowers over to her," said Cecile Deleville, who had tossed one over the lower fencing in December. "It’s as though they took that away, too."

The 67-year-old retiree dared to take her first look at the cathedral a day after the fire, along with reporters from The Associated Press. She said at the time that she felt like an orphan.

Now, she fears she won’t see Notre Dame reborn in her lifetime. Deleville worries that the reconstruction will fall by the wayside as France tries to rebuild its economy once the virus crisis has been overcome.

Those in charge of returning Notre Dame to its original splendor are still at work, despite being locked down.

The cathedral “has been gravely injured, undeniably so,” Jean-Louis Georgelin, a retired army general appointed by Macron to head the restoration project, said in an interview with the Catholic publication Le Pelerin.

But it has resisted thermal shock from the fire, water from hoses that drenched it for days, the summer heat and high winds, he said, adding that sensors installed to read any movement of the structure have picked up nothing notable.

Donations large and small are helping to pay for the restoration, with 188 million euros received, Georgelin told the daily Le Parisien. Some $437 million have been promised by the Total oil company and French tycoons Francois Pinault and Bernard Arnault of the luxury giant LVMH. It was the modest donations, mainly from people in France and the United States, that covered the initial costs.

On Wednesday, Georgia offered to help rebuild some of the large clerestory windows located far above eye level. The German government said three glass-makers that conduct restoration work for cathedrals in Germany could offer "great expertise" to their French colleagues.

A timeline for the reconstruction may need to be redrawn to account for the virus lockdown. What also is unclear is what the new spire will look like. Will it be a copy of architect Eugene-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc’s 19th-century creation in lead that soared 315 feet high, or be a contemporary version?
**Eugene Sheffer Crossword**

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**CRYPTOQUIP**

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Saturday’s Cryptoquip: WHAT WOULD SOMEBODY CALL A PORCH WITH STEPS IN FRONT OF SINGER GLEN’S HOUSE? CAMPBELL’S STOOP.

Today’s Cryptoquip Clue: X equals W
Birthday honk

Bernice Plantier sits outside her home Friday, her 104th birthday, receiving well wishes, honks, waves, and a few gifts handed through car windows in Pittsfield, Mass. Because of the threat of COVID-19, Plantier could not have a party, so her family decorated the lawn in her honor and invited friends and family to drive by and wish her a happy birthday.

The West Virginia Office of Miners’ Health, Safety and Training said the man was found in a Mingo County mine, where he apparently became lost after trespassing.

Timothy Kennedy, 26, was reported missing April 9 by a family member. An investigation led to the Gilbert-area mine, which was suffering from a gun-shot wound to the top of her head, news outlets reported.

After Wilson was found more than a week later, he fled, first in a car and then on foot, the release said. Marshals sent K-9 Echo after Wilson, and he was tracked to a crawlspace inside an abandoned home, the release said.

Echowt in Wilson multiple times, and he later left the crawlspace, authorities said.

Man reported missing found in closed mine

WV WILLIAMSON — A man reported missing more than a week ago was found alive in a closed West Virginia mine, state officials.

The sign had sat along Route 66 since the 1940s. The motor lodge had been converted into an apartment complex and then was destroyed by fire in 2014.

Larry Mann and his wife have owned the Park Plaza Cinema on Hilton Head Island for more than a decade. Like other movie theaters in the U.S., they’ve had to make a switch to showing movies online.

The Island Packet reported that the couple revamped the theater’s website to stream films not yet available on platforms such as Netflix. Mann says streaming movies on his site will generally cost about $12.

“Then we could figure out how to get everyone popcorn, we would do that, too,” Mann said.

Virgin Orbit conducts last test before launch

CA MOJAVE — Virgin Orbit said it has conducted its final major test before an upcoming demonstration of its system in which a rocket will be launched and carried aloft and launched.

More rare whales prompt new protections

MA BOSTON — Federal ocean managers asked mariners to slow down east of Boston because of a new sighting of rare whales in the area.

Private citizens found an aggregation of North Atlantic right whales in the area. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said it is asking mariners to go around the area or travel through it at 10 knots or less until April 24.

Right whales number only about 400 and are one of the rarest large ocean animals.

The whales are moving along the East Coast at the moment and NOAA is asking boaters and fishermen to take steps to avoid harming them.

Plane makes emergency landing on interstate

OH CINCINNATI — A small plane made an emergency landing on an interstate highway in Cincinnati, but no injuries were reported, authorities said.

The pilot was the only person aboard the single-engine Beechcraft Bonanza plane that came down in the northbound lanes of Interstate 75 near the Ronald Reagan Cross County Highway.

The plane did not hit any vehicles and eventually came to rest against a concrete barrier, police said.

It wasn’t immediately clear where the plane had departed from, but officials said the pilot was headed to Lunken Airport in Cincinnati when he reported a loss of engine power. It’s not yet known what caused the issue.

From wire reports
Marc Maron has a potty mouth, yes, and he's certainly irreverent (“I’m not a God guy,” but the prolific comedian, actor and “WTF” podcaster who interviewed President Barack Obama in his Los Angeles garage is also a 20-year-sober “recovering hypochondriac” with solid advice for getting through a pandemic.

“I have learned over time, if you don’t feel well, you should just wait,” Maron said April 6 as he paced in his kitchen during a phone interview. “If you’re not coughing up blood or have a horrible fever or some other physical complication, just wait a couple days and see what happens.”

Maron, whose new “End Times Fun” comedy special is streaming on Netflix, has pretty good cred as a hypochondriac, which he defines as “someone who decides they’re sick and commits to it, with limited or no evidence. It’s like, I got dizzy, so I must have MS.”

There are some provisos, however. “In a time of plague, if you cough and think you have it, that’s not hypochondria, that’s fear, and there are plenty of reasons to be afraid.”

Maron’s explicit riff about how he was “cured” of hypochondriasis in his 20s starts with a personal explanation: “My father was a doctor, which means I was a hypochondriac. How else are you going to get their attention?”

The cure? After Maron made multiple visits to a urologist friend of his father’s, insisting he had prostate cancer (as a sophomore in college) and then herpes (though he’d never had sex), the doctor looked up from Maron’s penis and said, “There’s nothing here, Marc. Do you like coming here?”

— Maron said he had a clarifying moment with the urologist’s help — “of realizing it’s ridiculous.”

It’s a whole belief thing, Maron said. “People can believe things they know are probably not true, because it makes them feel better. ... There’s some kind of frightened-child element to it, and the tools you need to fix it are some kind of positive and rational self-parenting. Somebody in your mind has to say, ‘You’re probably OK. If it gets worse, we’ll go to the doctor, but right now, let’s relax, have some tea and a good night’s rest.’ ”

So did he turn to hypochondria to get his busy father’s attention?

“Absolutely,” Maron said. “It’s always about attention and reassurance. You can work yourself into a frenzy of panic and terror. ... I have gone to the doctor because my hands were tingling, dizziness, inability to breathe, things I saw on my skin, muscular problems, gas that wouldn’t stop ... and I can tell you, a lot of times whatever you’re experiencing is going to pass.”

The trick is finding the reassurance you need to know that you’re OK, he said, “because if you try hard enough, you can manifest the symptoms of most things by just obsessing.”

But in times like these, when a deadly virus could be lurking on a grocery shelf, Maron said it’s harder to find that calm.

“Get hung on this idea sometimes, how to weigh reassurance, because there is a point where you’re not going to be OK. That moment happens for everybody. So when people go, ‘You’re going to be all right,’ I always think in the other side of my head, ‘That’s going to run out.’ ”

So how to deal with your legitimate fear during a pandemic?

Maron said he goes for runs and keeps busy holeed up at home, where he records his “WTF” podcast twice a week. Podcasts have been deemed essential services, he said, but they’ve become more complicated during the lockdown. Maron said he’s never done a phone interview in his 1,200 podcasts, because “talking in person is better.”

“There’s a quality to a face-to-face conversation that cannot be captured in any mediated view. ‘If you’re going to worry, worry about a particular bunch of political leaders. There’s no leadership from the government; it’s constant chaos. You have to figure out the most scientific, rational way to handle this. ‘Don’t become one of those belligerent, conspiracy-hoarding group of citizens saying, ‘You can’t tell us what to do.’ Even if we are overreacting, this is one of those times you err on the side of caution. Don’t get all ... childish because you want to go to Fridays for your happy hour.’ ”

Take a breath

“If you have a 104 fever and can’t breathe, go to the hospital. But if you think you’ve got it because you have a little cough in the morning? You just have to wait it out a little bit. ‘If you’re going to worry, worry about overtaking this health care system. Preventive medicine is the best. Get your physical every year, eat properly and maintain a certain amount of fitness. Most people don’t even get their ... annual checkups, but now they have a cough and they need to see a doctor? People sit around and take turmeric and vitamin C, but they won’t go see a doctor once a year for a physical? What are they afraid of?’ ”

Learn the Serenity Prayer

“There’s a lot of immaturity and fear, because everybody is trying to have some control over something they don’t have any control over. I’m not a God guy, but the serenity prayer is a powerful idea — ‘God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can and wisdom to know the difference’ — because what do you really have control over?”

Maron’s advice on how to cope

Listen to health professionals

“Pick a source of information coming from reasonable scientific people, which means you can’t really listen to a particular bunch of political leaders. There’s no leadership from the government; it’s constant chaos. You have to figure out the most scientific, rational way to handle this. ‘Don’t become one of those belligerent, conspiracy-hoarding group of citizens saying, ‘You can’t tell us what to do.’ Even if we are overreacting, this is one of those times you err on the side of caution. Don’t get all ... childish because you want to go to Fridays for your happy hour.’ ”

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Amid a pandemic, the calming power of a simple walk

BY HENRY OLSEN
Special to The Washington Post

The wind has hit, but the sun is high and indiscernible on this early-spring day. Three blocks from the local high school, the usual cul-de-sac at idle of my morning walk at 3 o’clock has disappeared, as has the noise that blasted from them. On the side- walk, a group of women in the background trade loudly toward town can’t be heard. So much of the daily rhythm made by cars and people has stopped, and it’s left a quiet that is disconcerting and makes you think of those of us who go for daily walks. But the walks themselves still bring comfort, if not because I’ve been made a citizen of a world of store closed. This means that Americans aren’t leaving their homes.

In the days after shutdowns began to sweep the nation, the ability of our national parks, forcing some to close temporarily to protect staff. Over a March weekend in the Seattle area, hundreds of people crowded hotspots like Alki Beach to walk, bike, play in sand — this despite statewide bans on large gatherings. It’s been a time not thinking of ourselves,” he told CNN. “I’m giving us the tools to do our jobs, but walk down the sidewalk, and you’ll see that’s not the case.

In Britain, the government announced a sweeping nationwide lockdown that re- stricted outside exercise to only once a day, and police were granted the authority to enforce these rules. France declared a two-month state of emergency, imposing still stricter rules: Residents could go outside for up to one hour to complete es- sential tasks and exercise within only half-mile of their homes, but not for leisure.

In the United States, the situation has been different. While some states and cities have imposed restrictions on movement, others have allowed more freedom. This has come at a cost, however, as the coronavirus has claimed thousands of lives. The pandemic has also had a profound impact on mental health, with many feeling isolated and anxious.

Whitmer’s political career has been marked by a mix of success and setbacks. In 2018, she was elected Governor of Michigan, becoming the first woman to hold that office.

Henry Olsen is a Washington Post columnist and a fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center.

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Ernie Gates

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**Adams rues timing of virus shutdown**

**By CIARAN FAHEY**
Associated Press

BERLIN — Tyler Adams picked the wrong time to be the fittest he’s been all season.

With the Bundesliga suspended indefinitely due to the new coronavirus outbreak, the 21-year-old from Wappinger, N.Y., is unsure when he will be able to play a competitive game for Leipzig again or even whether the season will be completed.

Adams injured a groin in Leipzig’s German Cup final loss to Bayern Munich last May 25 and did not come back until Dec. 21. He played five Bundesliga matches, then strained his hamstring in the 77th minute of Leipzig’s 4-0 loss to Fürth in its Champions League match on Feb. 11.

But the team hasn’t played since, and the Bundesliga doesn’t know when the last nine rounds of games will be played.

“That’s a bit of a whirlwind,” Adams said by video link on Friday.

He has been using the time off to complete what he calls his pre-season, working on his fitness at home before training resumed in small groups at Leipzig’s ground.

“I’m really building up to my full capability,” Adams said. “Right now the body feels great, I feel fully recovered from any past injuries. My mental state is clear. I’m just focusing on being able to take it into games.

Germany has strict social distancing measures in place. Training is in groups of three or four — always while maintaining appropriate distance.

“It’s a little bit tricky. You can only do certain passing drills. You can do dribbling, you can do running and fitness, finishing. So you have all the individual variables of what it’s like to play in a game, but at the same time, it’s not going to be 11 vs. 11, right?” Adams said. “That’s the thing that hurts.”

New York has become a hotspot for the virus in the U.S. with more than 123,000 cases of COVID-19 registered and nearly 12,913 deaths through Saturday, according to Johns Hopkins.

Adams worries about his family back home, but said it was fortunate they live an hour and a half outside the city.

“It’s not too, too bad there yet, but the numbers there are still increasing. It’s a scary thing. My parents have their brothers at home with them, keeping them occupied, but right now they’re safe,” the player said. “It’s hard. You miss your family, you hope everyone’s safe.

Adams is among three 21-year-olds viewed as keys to the United States’ hopes in the 2022 World Cup, joined by Chelsea’s Christian Pulisic and Schalke’s Weston McKennie. But they have played together just once with the national team because of injuries, in a March 2019 exhibition against Ecuador.


The Bundesliga title appears attainable if the season resumes. Leipzig’s five points behind defending champion Bayern Munich.

Bundesliga clubs were hoping to return to play in May without spectators, but this week the ban on large gatherings was extended to Aug. 31, affecting the start of next season, too.

Playing without fans wouldn’t be a problem for Adams, thinking back to his games in 2015 and 16 for Red Bulls II in the then-third-tier United Soccer League.

“There were a lot of empty stadiums at the time,” he said. “Being able to go out and play would be a great feeling, but you only want to do so when it keeps everybody safe — in the players, all the staff involved in running games, and of course the fans. If we continue to play with no spectators, and that keeps them safe, then I would be glad to do that.”

Adams is in regular contact with McKenzie, Austria Vienna’s Erik Palmer-Brown and other American players who are overseas.

“It’s been unique to see what they’re going through. For (Palmer-Brown) they haven’t even had the opportunity to train again. They haven’t even been able to leave the house for a run,” Adams said. “Fortunately enough in Germany, we’re still able to get out.”

**Spain set to finish soccer season without fans**

**By TALES AZZONI**
Associated Press

MADRID — Soccer matches and other sports events in Spain will take place in fan-free venues at least until the end of the summer, the mayor of Madrid said Saturday.

Jose Luis Martinez-Almeida told the Onda Cero radio station that the coronavirus pandemic likely “won’t be under control” by then for events with big crowds to resume normally.

“In the spring and summer there won’t be any events with crowds in Spain, and possibly not in the fall either,” Martinez-Almeida said. “Because obviously the virus will not be fully under control. We will have to change our habits and behaviors even after being allowed to go back on the streets.”

Spain has been one of the hardest-hit countries with more than 190,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19, only behind the United States. More than 20,000 have died in the European nation. The Spanish league is not expecting to resume at least until the end of May. It is working on several scenarios, including playing without fans through the fall.

“The soccer matches without fans in the summer is a possibility, as long as health and safety conditions are observed,” Martinez-Almeida said.

The soccer federation said this week that if the league can’t resume, it will use the current standings to decide the four clubs to play in the Champions League, which would mean giving the spots to Barcelona, Real Madrid, Sevilla and Real Sociedad.

The league has said the total losses for not finishing the season because of the pandemic could reach nearly $1.1 billion. The losses if the league resumes with matches in empty stadiums would be about $325 million, and if it restarts with fans it would be nearly $163 million.

Martinez-Almeida also said it was a “mistake” for Atletico Madrid fans to play its Champions League game against Liverpool. Nearly 3,000 Atletico fans attended the game on March 11, just days before the Spanish government declared a state of emergency and established lockdown measures that are expected to remain in place at least until April 26.
On ice: Shutdown has Devils’ Fitzgerald waiting on 2 fronts

By Tom Canavan
Associated Press

The suspension of play in the NHL because of the coronavirus pandemic has put Tom Fitzgerald of the New Jersey Devils in a strange situation.

The 51-year-old is waiting to see if the league will finish its season and whether he gets to keep his job.

Fitzgerald is the only interim general manager in the league. He took over Jan. 12, when Ray Shero was fired, and has guided the struggling Devils to a 12-8-5 record.

There are five others in the NHL also in limbo during this time of isolation. They are the league’s interim coaches: Geoff Ward of the Calgary Flames, Alain Nasreddine of the Devils, Bob Boughner of the San Jose Sharks, and Dean Evason of the Minnesota Wild.

“My job is to lead the hockey operations department until told otherwise,” Fitzgerald said Thursday. “And that’s all I’m trying to do right now is continue to do the job, not think of the what ifs, because I just think I can muddle the waters and distract an individual from thinking again, those whatvers.”

Fitzgerald said Nadredinne, who has led the Devils to a 19-16-8 record since replacing John Hynes on Dec. 3, is doing the same thing. He is focusing on his job. Fitzgerald joked that while he has the interim tag, everybody in the NHL is in the same category.

Fitzgerald has weekly discussions with team owners Josh Harris and David Blitzer. His job is to keep everyone on their toes. He has the scouts working on their talent evaluations and the players and coaches prepared to return.

“I’ve got an opportunity to grow as a manager,” Fitzgerald said. “I feel really good about where I am and the job that I’ve done so far with the help of a lot of people in the organization. It takes a village to build success. Whether my future’s here or not, the future is here until they tell me otherwise. And if that’s the case of whatever, I’ll cross that bridge.”

Of all the guys with the interim coaching tags, Ward might be in the best shape. He has led the Flames to a 24-15-3 mark since replacing Bill Peters on Nov. 26. They were in a playoff spot when the season was halted.

Fitzgerald has weekly discussions with Evason. He replaced Bruce Boudreau on Dec. 11.

“Boughy and I have input from the players and his staff. Boughner was hurt by injuries and suspensions in posting a 14-20-3 record after replacing Peter DeBoer on Nov. 26,” Fitzgerald said. “You’re being a little naïve if you think you have to have all the answers.”

Sharks general manager Doug Wilson will decide Boughner’s future after the season. He wants input from the players and his staff. Boughner was hurt by injuries and suspensions in posting a 14-20-3 record after replacing Peter DeBoer on Nov. 26.

“We have all the answers,” he said. “You’re being a little naïve if you think you have to have all the answers.”

Sharks general manager Doug Wilson will decide Boughner’s future after the season. He wants input from the players and his staff. Boughner was hurt by injuries and suspensions in posting a 14-20-3 record after replacing Peter DeBoer on Nov. 26.

“The things we were looking for, I thought we were addressing,” Wilson said. “Boughy and I have talked a lot about clarifying how we want to play, and ultimately getting your team to commit to playing the right way for longer periods of time regardless of your talent level.”

Bowness has posted a 20-13-5 mark with the Stars since replacing Jim Montgomery on Dec. 10. Dallas was in third place and a playoff spot when play was halted.

If general manager Jim Nill is looking for a positive besides the record, the Stars have given up 177 goals, second-fewest in the league to Boston (174).

The Wild have a difficult choice with Evason. He replaced Bruce Boudreau on Feb. 14 and has posted a 12-8 record in his first shot as an NHL coach.
Remote draft to have dry run

By Barry Wilner
Associated Press

The NFL will hold a practice remote draft Monday, three days before the real thing is done in the same way.

Detroit Lions general manager Bob Quinn on Friday did not provide details on the proceedings — except what his team has planned.

“We’re going to do a couple internal tests and trial runs here,” Quinn said in a Zoom meeting to preview the draft. “The league is having a mock draft, mock trial run on Monday that we’ll participate in.”

Commissioner Roger Goodell ordered all team facilities closed in March, and later required club personnel to conduct the draft from their homes. Because of the reliance on free-flowing communication, the league decided to stage a mock draft to ensure all goes smoothly next Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

The draft originally was scheduled for Las Vegas, but the NFL canceled all public events last month as a safeguard against the coronavirus. On April 6, Goodell instructed teams on how they should plan to make selections.

“After consulting with medical advisers, we cannot identify an alternative that is preferable from a medical or public health perspective, given the varying needs of clubs, the need properly to screen participants, and the unique risk factors that individual club employees may face,” he wrote.

Among the technologies needed for the actual draft are team web meetings and a web hookup with the league itself. There also will be phone lines for communication with other teams for trades, which must be approved by the NFL central office.

“I’m at my house and I have a home office that I use occasionally during the season and occasionally during the offseason — not very much,” Quinn said. “But I’m sitting at a TV in my right. I have three monitors to my left, I have two laptops. I have a huge what we would call our ‘draft phone,’ I have my home phone. I have two cell phones, and I have a printer. So that’s kind of my setup that I’m looking at right now.

“We can’t obviously replicate our draft board in my office here, our draft board, our cell phones, all of those things will be emailed, printed, they’ll probably be screen-shared on some platform that we’re still evaluating — to use next week. Then we’ll have redundancies on everything.”

Security will be paramount, considering the possibility of crossed communication lines that allow one club’s personnel to hear discussions of another team’s decision makers.

“The league allows an IT person to be present at your house and a security guy there just in case people don’t like your picks, they’re not knocking on your door or ringing the doorbell,” said Brett Veach, general manager of the Super Bowl champion Kansas City Chiefs.

One logistical concern involves the flow of information and ability to communicate when teams are on the clock. There could be complications if a team has settled on a player and is about to make a selection to end a round.

“I think the scenario that we’re all kind of playing through our mind is when you’re on the clock and you’re about to turn a card in,” Veach said. “And then with 45 seconds left, a team comes in and presents a really interesting trade. When you’re in the office, you can look to a guy and (quickly) discuss the offer.

“Just making sure that we don’t have a slow connection at 45 seconds. So, that’s a little bit of a concern, just that last-minute trade that you get the phone call on the clock.”

GMs: league’s remote draft may change trade dynamics

By Tom Canavan
Associated Press

To trade or not to trade?
An especially difficult question in this year’s NFL Draft?
The coronavirus pandemic has forced the NFL to conduct its annual draft remotely, which might reduce the number of times Commissioner Roger Goodell or anyone else announces a trade.

General managers around the league said this week the remote nature of the draft will change the way teams move up and down in the order next Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Spor of the moment deals might be difficult to engineer with team officials at their homes and not in “war rooms” in their headquarters. It will be nearly impossible to look around the room for a quick consensus.

And if a communications connection is lost — IT guys have been working countless hours to make sure that does not happen — or a phone goes dead, what happens?

The more likely scenarios for trades are ones that are premeditated. Take for example, the Detroit Lions and New York Giants, who hold the third and fourth picks overall, respectively.

Both teams have been listening to offers this week, Lions GM Bob Quinn and Giants counterpart Dave Gettleman have said.

“It’s something I would very seriously entertain,” said Gettleman, whose team is in position to take a much-needed offensive tackle.

The Lions are listening, too. There has been talk of the Dolphins and others jumping up to No. 3 to grab a quarterback — or whatever.

“I think just the way the world we’re living in, with this being virtual, I think a lot of those things, if I’m going to do something, I think we’re going to have a pretty good idea Thursday afternoon of where we stand,” Quinn said. “I don’t think I’m going to be making a huge decision on trading the No. 3 overall pick while I’m on the clock, while I’m virtually talking to our head coach and our other personnel.”

Gettleman said the trade squeeze would be felt most after the second round. The first round is 10 minutes in length. The second is seven. Rounds 3-6 will fall to five minutes a pick. It drops to four minutes in the seventh and final round.

“It’s going to be tight to try to do that, to try to trade back or trade up,” Gettleman said of the final five rounds. “I think what’s going to happen, what this is going to force everybody to do is, do deals before their pick is up. So, let’s say … one team calls another team and says, ‘I want to trade up.’ They’ll make a deal off the clock, and then if the guy is there for the team that wants to move up, then they’ll consummate the trade. I think a lot of it is going to be done ahead of time.”

Philadelphia Eagles personnel director Howie Roseman said talks between teams have been no different this week than previous years.

“We all have each other’s phone numbers and we all have multiple phone lines,” Roseman said. “I think there will be the same level of communication because that doesn’t change.”

If he wants to talk to Chiefs GM Brett Veach, he’s just a call or text away.

Veach is in a new spot for this draft: The Super Bowl champions are bringing up the rear of the opening round.

“One thing that I think every team is most concerned about is just the flow and the effectiveness of communication. If you’re on the clock and you’re working through your scenarios, then you finally come up with, ‘OK, we like this guy,’” Veach said.

“(Or) we don’t like any of these trades. Or, we like this trade, and we want to do this trade. … I think the scenario that we’re all kind of playing through our mind is when you’re on the clock and you’re about to turn a card in, and then with 45 seconds left, a team comes in and presents a really interesting trade.”

The NFL will conduct a mock draft on Monday to test whether teams can navigate those late-minute scenarios.

What seems certain is LSU quarterback Joe Burrow going No. 1 overall to Cincinnati, then Ohio State edge rusher Chase Young taken next by Washington. After that, how many times will Goodell announce a trade from home? Will fewer deals happen because of this year’s draft dynamics?

No doubt, phones will be ringing for three days next week.

“If someone calls you up and their chart doesn’t match yours and they make an offer and you don’t think it’s a good deal, you don’t do it,” Gettleman said. “I’d think, ‘That’s simple. If both groups are motivated, you’d come to some kind of conclusion.’

Ohio State defensive end Chase Young, considered the likely No. 1 pick. This year’s NFL Draft, held remotely, may mean teams will be less likely to trade draft choices, general managers say.
Remote draft a new challenge for networks

By JOE REEDY
Associated Press

The NFL Draft is annually one of the most ambitious productions that ESPN does. This week's coverage might go down as THE most ambitious in the network's 40-year history.

With the NFL closing team complexes and canceling plans to hold the draft in Las Vegas, this year's event is shaping up as a logistical challenge. ESPN Vice President of Production Seth Markham says there are usually 10 remote locations during the first round. On Thursday night, there might be as many as 180.

“Safe to say, we have never had a year like this. It's a great opportunity to bring fans hope and joy and an escape from what we are experiencing,” Markham said. “We do enjoy challenges. We will make it happen, but it is damn complicated.”

ESPN and NFL Network will air a combined broadcast all three days. It will now originate from ESPN’s headquarters in Bristol, Conn., but most of the reporters and analysts will be at their homes.

Mark Quenzel, NFL Network’s Senior Vice President of Programming and Production, said the two networks had been in discussions about a joint production once it appeared the draft wouldn’t take place in Las Vegas.

With everyone spread out, the biggest challenge will be making sure there aren't any technical difficulties. Reporters have been able to get on air from home for nearly a month while draft prospects, coaches and general managers received kits from the league.

Quenzel said the league has set up three call centers to handle the various feeds — one for the prospects, one for coaches and team executives and another for fans. The league has also reached out to various wireless providers to make sure there is extra bandwidth with the grid isn't overloaded.

“Because fans are a unique part of the draft experience, ESPN has reached out via social media to get fan videos previewing the draft. There's no word yet whether fans voting commissioner Roger Goodell before each pick will be piped in to make it feel like an authentic draft.”

Goodell will introduce first-round picks from his home in Bronxville, N.Y. “We're trying to streamline the feeds along with having as many backups as we can,” Goodell said. “The execution of the draft, as far as what we can show with the teams, will be the same. Everyone has the same technology and availability.”

ESPN’s Trey Wingo and Suzy Kolber will be the only ones in the studio for the ESPN-NFL Network telecast. Wingo will be anchoring his fourth draft and Kolber will be conducting interviews with draft-tees. Mel Kiper Jr. — who will be with ESPN for his 37th draft — Louis Riddick and Booger McFarland will be providing analysis from their homes.

ESPN also has nine reporters monitoring teams throughout the three days, including Adam Schefter and Chris Mortensen.

NFL Network’s crew includes host Rich Eisen, who has been a part of all 17 drafts the network has done, along with analysts Daniel Jeremiah, Michael Irvin and Kurt Warner.

Markham said there are normally 15 in the control room at one time during the draft, but it will be limited to seven. They will also use two control rooms so that everyone has their own area and adheres to social distancing guidelines.

Those in the control room will also wear masks, which could be an extra challenge for producers and directors trying to communicate.

ESPN will air a separate draft broadcast on Thursday and Friday for the second straight year before simulcasting the ESPN-NFL Network feed on Saturday.

The ABC telecasts will again be more feature-based and focus on prospects’ road to the draft, along with the roles their families have played. Rece Davis, Jesse Palmer and Maria Taylor will host the coverage from Bristol, with analysis from Todd McShay, Mike Herbstreit, Desmond Howard and David Pollack. Tom Rinaldi will provide most of the pre-taped features.

“We set up for a big ratings year because of the quality of this year’s class, but now we are waiting and seeing,” Markham said. “We don’t have the competition that we normally have (with the NBA and NHL playoffs). Whether that means more eye-balls and anticipation, I don’t know.”

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NFL DRAFT

Lenoir Rhyne’s Kyle Dugger, left, intercepts a pass intended for Vanderbilt’s Jared Pinkney during practice for the Senior Bowl in Mobile, Ala., in January. Dugger made Hickory, N.C., a must stop for NFL scouts last fall.

Deeper: Scouts don’t sleep on prospects

FROM BACK PAGE

“It hasn’t been the easiest switch going from not having any of that (publicity) to having a lot of it,” Dugger said during the league’s annual event combining in Indianapolis. “But they (school officials) definitely got behind me and they’re really excited about it.”

So not long ago, scouts didn’t know much about Dugger, either. He remembers repeatedly answering three questions: What school, where is it located, and how did he end up in Division II?

Then again, it’s easy for football players to get lost in Hickory, a small city full of Southern charm nestled between Interstate 40 and the Blue Ridge Parkway. There, fans flock to feature races under the Saturday night lights of 68-year-old Hickory Motor Speedway, also known as “The Birthplace of the NASCAR Stars.” Baseball fans line up to see Hickory Crawdads games. Bob Gibbons, one of college basketball’s original recruiting experts, worked 25 miles away in Lenoir and has used the gym to host high school all-star games. The nearby mountains offer plenty of outdoors options.

So Lenoir-Rhyne football hasn’t always been the top choice for Saturday afternoon.

But when Dugger started turning heads, thousands showed up at 8,500-seat Moretz Stadium to see the budding star. Scouts followed, and soon Dugger was the feature attraction.

“The competitor in me definitely wanted more, at times,” he said. “I’d really dive into the details of what I was doing and see if I’m doing what I’m supposed to do — or was it me getting away with things because of the level of the competition.”

NFL executives knew better than to overlook another player from a school that barely registers on college football’s highlight shows.

The roll call includes Walter Payton of Jackson State, Jerry Rice of Mississippi Valley State and Carson Wentz of North Dakota State. Joe Flacco and Darrell Green came out of Delaware and Texas A&M-Kingsville, respectively. Dugger finds himself at the head of another strong class that includes offensive lineman Ben Bartch of St. Johns (Minnesota), running back James Robinson of Illinois State, tight ends Charlie Toomey of Portland State and Adam Trautman of Dayton.

Three of the four, in addition to Dugger, were at the Senior Bowl. All five received combine invites, and most understood the club they’re trying to join.

Bartch’s story starts like so many others. He was a high school tight end with no Division I offers, opting to play at a Division III school primarily because he liked the area, loved the sport, and the school gave him a chance to extend his career.

Two years later, the coaches asked him to move to left tackle.

Then came the big twist.

Bartch spent the next three months cramming in study sessions between class-work, conditioning and coaching at a local high school. Sometimes, he relied on YouTube videos to learn the position.

To save time, Bartch devised his own breakfast smoothie creation. He describes the “magic shake” as a concoction of seven eggs, a large tub of cottage cheese, quick grits, peanut butter and a banana, topped off with a splash of Gatorade. It helped him go from 250 pounds to 305 as he turned into an NFL prospect.

“I put on 30 pounds, cut all in and plug my nose,” Bartch said. “I’d gag sometimes, but that’s what you have to do.”

Now Bartch should become the first St. John’s player taken since 1974, (DT Kurt Wachtler to the Vikings in the 15th round). Bartch would be the highest draft pick in John’s player taken since the turn of the century, he’ll be on a stage where everyone knows his name, school and story.

“It’s something I will use as a stepping stone,” he said. “But I kind of like being in the underdog role, kind of that dark side, villainous role, and I think it’s something I’m going to continue doing.”

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**The competitor in me definitely wanted more, at times.**

Kyle Dugger

Lenoir-Rhyne CB
As the sports world pauses to join the rest of the world in fighting the coronavirus pandemic, you will see fewer sports stories in Stars and Stripes. We look forward to resuming our normal coverage when the leagues and governing bodies determine it is safe for athletes and fans to return to competition.

**NFL DRAFT**

Everything on hold
Season’s suspension put Devils’ interim GM in tough spot » Page 21

**Digging deeper**

Division II standout Dugger leads another strong class of small-school prospects

**INDIANAPOLIS**

Kyle Dugger played most of his college football career in the shadows of higher-profile players and programs. Appalachian State was less than a two-hour drive north of the Lenoir-Rhyne campus. The Tobacco Road triad of Duke, North Carolina and North Carolina State was about two hours east, and Knoxville, home of the Tennessee Volunteers, was less than three hours to the west.

Dugger isn’t taking a back seat to any of them.

Last fall, he forced NFL scouts to add a new stop on their weekend trips, Hickory, N.C., where they unearthed a hidden gem — maybe the best draft prospect football fans don’t know.

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NOT TO BE OVERLOOKED

NFL executives know better than to ignore players from schools that barely register on college football’s highlight shows. The roll call of small-school standouts to make it big in the NFL includes Walter Payton of Jackson State, Jerry Rice of Mississippi Valley State and Carson Wentz of North Dakota State. Joe Flacco and Darrell Green came out of Delaware and Texas A&M-Kingsville, respectively.

SOURCE: Associated Press

NOT TO BE OVERLOOKED

After following up an impressive showing for the South at the Senior Bowl in January with some eye-opening numbers at the NFL Combine in March, Lenoir-Rhyne safety Kyle Dugger could be the highest-selected Division II player since the turn of the century.

Butch Dill/AP