

# Community members share thoughts on COVID, economy

By Jarrett Whitener  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

The downward trend in COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths around the state and nation has many community members hopeful that the ongoing coronavirus saga will come to an end sooner rather than later.

While shopping at Dollar General on Thursday, Sept. 10, Chris Paxton of Ellijay said he felt confident people have been doing their parts to stay safe while in public.

"I'd like to think that things have gotten better in these last few months," Paxton said. "For COVID, it seems that our numbers have gone down, and there is less to hear about it lately. I know it is still here for a while longer, but I think we have a grasp on it."

"I never minded the mask-wearing in stores and

whatnot. I don't wear them outside all that much, but if there are crowded areas or a store recommends them, then I think it is a good idea to wear them. Maybe by Christmastime we can get this out of the way and move on."

Julie Reinhart of Murphy, North Carolina, expressed gratitude to be living in an area where large crowds are not part of the day to day routine for most people.

"My son lives in Charleston, South Carolina, and thankfully he hasn't really been exposed to the virus or anything there," Reinhart said at Save-A-Lot on Saturday, Sept. 12. "I was afraid when all that partying was going on at the beaches in Florida that they would do that where he lives."

"Around here, people don't really group up too much because we have more older folks that don't get out. I think that has helped us not spread it

as much around here. I think if we keep doing what we have been, then we will continue to be fine. I think this is a safe area, and we have done our best."

While everyone holds out hope for a conclusion to the pandemic, the focus for some community members remains on the impacts of the shutdowns and other mitigation efforts.

Union County resident Avery Dallas fears that the pandemic and reactions to it have affected the housing market in a negative way and that some locals may be out of a home if the job market doesn't pick back up.

"I worry about the economy," Dallas said while shopping at Walmart Saturday. "I've been seeing a lot of houses around the area being sold, and it worries me. I wonder if people are losing their homes because they don't have jobs.



Most visitors to local stores still appear to be wearing masks while shopping.

Photo by Jarrett Whitener

The people that are buying these places will be those that are moving from the big cities.

"For our area, people moving in wouldn't be that

great for the economy right now. If people don't have jobs and they can't go back to work, I don't see how it will balance out when the homes get bought up.

"I just don't think this is a good time for the housing market, and I'm afraid that it will lead to problems down the road."

## Appreciation Breakfast...from Page 1A



Longtime Allegheny Lodge member Johnnie Garmon, currently serving as the Grand Master of Masons in Georgia, called for moments of silence Friday in honor of those who died on 9/11/01.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

to be there but were on the clock.

Ivy Smith is the Worshipful Master of Allegheny Lodge for 2020, and to prepare the breakfast, he enlisted the primary help of his son and Junior Deacon Peyton Smith, as well as friend and Senior Warden Murl Tackett.

Together, they made sausage, eggs, biscuits, gravy,

pancakes and bacon to serve at the lower pavilion in Meeks Park, where they enlisted six other freemasons to serve the first responders and make the event a success.

Also assisting was fellow mason and The View Grill Manager Matt Leonard, who helped the lodge procure many supplies necessary for the breakfast.

"I was a medic for over 10 years," Worshipful Master Smith said. "So, to be able to give back to the community and to the first responders, especially right now with everything going on and how underappreciated they feel, I think it's even more important than ever."

"We were worried we weren't going to get to have (the breakfast), but I'm glad that we figured out a way to hold it. And it turned out to be one of the best ones that I've been involved with since I've been a part of Allegheny Masonic Lodge."

The lodge has had to cancel dozens of events and activities due to COVID-19 this year, which has impacted fundraising for the two big initiatives supported by Allegheny, namely the Masonic Youth Home and scholarships for local graduating seniors, though the lodge supports many other endeavors.

Fortunately, Smith said Allegheny Lodge will be able to keep supporting these initiatives, even in the face of the financial squeeze applied by COVID-19 and the responses to it.

In terms of the first



Allegheny Lodge Senior Warden Murl Tackett serving up some delicious breakfast in the Sept. 11 First Responder Breakfast in Meeks Park.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

responders themselves, those who could attend were definitely feeling the love Friday.

"It's an honor - it means a lot," Fire Batt. Chief Richard Jones said. "The masons have always stepped up and been very good to us, and we enjoy it. It brings us together, and it's good to be honored."

Union County Sheriff

Mack Mason said he, too, appreciated the masons and their honoring of the victims of 9/11, many of whom were first responders also.

"It's good to have their support, and it's good that people still remember what happened 19 years ago," Mason said. "It can't happen again."

"If we don't have a

strong military and aggressively pursue these Taliban members and other terrorist groups - we've even got some here within the United States - we need to stay abreast of them, and when we can, either arrest them or kill them."

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