

Amidst CORONAVIRUS

Some quaratined at home, others worked

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When Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds first ordered the closure of businesses on March 17 to mitigate the spread of the Coronavirus, it was obvious changes would be felt as students settled into the ‘new normal.’ For some, it was adjusting to the loss of the social buzz of school. For others, the chance to finish classes they were passionate about. And for many, it was adjusting to radical changes at their jobs—working more, less, not at all, and operating under vastly different rules and procedures.

Furloughs

Most high schoolers worked in service industries, like retail, grocery stores and restaurants. The governor’s Disaster Proclamations impacted these areas in multifaceted ways. Senior Sabryn Labenz worked at the Old Navy in the Merle Hay Mall, but was furloughed mid-March. Her store “paid us through April, which was pretty nice because that was essentially free money,” but other people were not so lucky.

Flix Brewhouse, also in Merle Hay Mall, could not afford to pay its staff, which caused senior Fabiola Gamboa to seek new employment at the still busy Urbandale Hy-Vee. “We hadn’t heard any information about opening up,” Gamboa said, despite the governor’s announcement that malls could open May 8.

Internships

Students in internships their second semester were out of luck when it came to recovering valuable wages and experience they would have gained. Their woes were compounded because they rarely had a comparable opportunity available to turn to, such as Gamboa did. Although senior Kara Green earned six college elective credits through her internship at a legal firm, she said “I was supposed to start working with a lawyer, and I was going to get to sit in on legal cases down at the courthouse. Now I won’t get to do that.”

Senior Laura Paul was too unable to complete an internship at Bluestone, an engineering firm. “They usually gave me sheets to edit and fix, but...they are already running short on work for their full-time employees,” and had no other work for her, Paul said.

Work-place Changes

Those that were still working experienced radical changes to the way their stores operated. Stores cut hours or closed different locations to alleviate the spread of the virus. Senior Heather DeBruin worked at the childcare center Generation Next and said the staff there immediately began “deep cleaning everything. We used very specific [non-toxic] cleaning products that would be safe for the children, bleached entire rooms and moved kids to different rooms...to get down to 10 kids per room.”

Other stores sanitized their surfaces, but with rather mixed success. Junior Jon Allemagne said that checkers at his Hy-Vee were told to wipe down their register’s belt after every customer, “but some people impose themselves...and put their stuff down [before we clean] so we can’t follow our guidelines.” He believed, though, that most of his customers meant well. “They’re just a bit wiggled



Junior Marandah Mangra-Dutcher checks out a customer while working at Hy-Vee during quarantine. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Hy-Vee required all employees to wear masks and stand behind plexiglass partitions. Photo by: Jordyn Cimmiyotti

out,” he said.

Not all non-essential businesses closed; however, those that were still open were generally pretty busy, given the number of employees who opted to self-quarantine. Senior Tyler Davis said the Subway he worked at, on 86th Street in Johnston, was one of the last Subways still open. “When people come in around 11 a.m., there was usually just a line to the door...but now the line goes outside, because we aren’t allowed to have more than 10 people in the store.” Restaurants in 77 counties closed their dining areas until May 1, when the governor approved those counties to reopen, with the other 22 counties, including Polk, reopening dining rooms on May 15.

Grocery stores, though, had no breaks. They ran at near-peak operation. Topping the list of essential services, they were far and away the most busy services still available. As such, student-grocers worked far more than they usually would. “I work a lot more now...35-40 hours-a-week” junior Jacque Heggen said, “but I do it to myself.” While Heggen wished she “could work that much during the school year,” other students wished they did not have to work as much.

Voluntary Learning not Voluntary for AP, DMACC Students

Students were still required to complete work for AP and DMACC dual-enrollment classes, so they could earn college credit. Tackling several of these courses while working caused students like seniors Madison Dunn and Brooklyn Dilley undue stress. The businesses where they worked were classified as essential. “Even though I’m a barista at Starbucks, somehow that’s essential,” Dunn said. Before the quarantine, Dunn worked 20-25 hours a week while still trying to balance AP classwork. “That was really exhausting,” she said. “I’m not used to working that much.” She thought it was ridiculous that she and Dilley, who worked at ACE

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While wearing a mask, senior Trevor Jackson bags groceries for customers at Hy-Vee. All employees were required to wear masks. Customers could decide if they wanted to wear one. Some people chose to wear homemade masks while others wore the ones the store handed out. Photo by: Jordyn Cimmiyotti

my own tools,” Zimmerman said. He noted his new job was “much more interesting and satisfying, but much harder” than his former job at Chick-Fil-A.

Another outdoors worker, senior Kyle Geerts, was one of few students whose job remained virtually unchanged. Geerts was not so much an employee as an independent contractor. He mowed his neighbors’ lawns for a fee. “Yeah, I don’t wear gloves or a mask. Just my Batman hat,” Geerts said. His customers paid him electronically, or left money at his house so they did not come into contact.

Exercise Helped Pass Time

Beyond independent projects, previously minor hobbies blossomed into veritable pastimes for students who previously did not have the time to focus on them. Athletes who lamented the loss of their sports seasons and their inability to get into a gym took to designing at-home workout plans. Geerts and his fellow senior and cross-country runner Eric Schmitt ran together for a few weeks, until the increased threat of the virus forced them to continue their regimens apart. Geerts and Schmitt were part of what they called the ‘New Year’s group chat’ where each member pledged, at the beginning of the year, to do a certain amount of exercises a day. In response to being quarantined, Geerts increased his workload and added 30 pull-ups to his routine, which also included 150 crunches, 200 push-ups, 20 leg lifts, five minutes of planks and the pull-ups.

Junior Brandon Zimmer also pursued personal fitness, but in a more combative way. He picked up boxing from YouTubers he followed. One of the glories of new hobbies was that there need not be enormous goals attached. Zimmer said that boxing was a simple way “to relieve stress and get stronger. I don’t really want to fight. I might do sparring eventually, but that’s way down the line.” There was no time constraint. He was free to pursue it at leisure, an opportunity most students did not get during busy school-year schedules.

House Bound

The movement-oriented lifestyle of athletes did not cater to everyone. The student body was generally house-bound, and many used the opportunity to binge TV, movies, YouTube, anime, video games and any type of electronic media they could get their hands on. This included online meeting services, which took the country by storm as the most popular way to keep in touch with people. Sophomore and incoming Math Club Officer Jenna Woodsmall said she appreciated using Zoom to host club weekly meetings. “I love the virtual Math Club, for the community and the learning,” she said. “It’s a chance to do a non-awkward school thing, as opposed to official meetings with teachers,” which she described as rather stiff. Non-traditional entertainment, like virtual meetings, gained traction, and people speculated they might be here to stay after the virus ran its course.

Longtime anime fan senior Joe Arthur said he was able to focus on new shows since being confined to home. One of his favorites was “Happy Sugar Life,” a psychological horror that followed a main character whose externally pleasant life was marred by an intense longing to eliminate anything interfering with her ‘happy sugar life.’

Junior Emma Erdoes thought shows could be somewhat cathartic. She said they allowed viewers to experience a range of emotions they cannot or do not feel when stuck inside their house, and “allow people a chance to connect.”

Connecting with friends certainly became a challenge amidst the coronavirus crisis. Students surely became closer to their families, whether they wanted to or not. Progress, though, did not stop for students. They sat six feet apart, but did not sit idle. They demonstrated they will not be swayed from their goals by the most widespread catastrophes. But the coronavirus certainly made life less than enjoyable. As senior Laura Paul so eloquently put it, “screw Corona, man.”

Hardware in Ankeny, were asked to go into work because they were essential workers.

Dilley, like Heggen, worked 40 or more hours-a-week. “About 60% of our staff is staying home...because they are older people,” Dilley said, “so everyone who is able to work is working pretty much all day, every day.” Jobs like Dunn’s and Dilley’s provided the materials required for independent activities, like baking and gardening, that alleviated the boredom of quarantine.

Instead of Voluntary Online Learning, Students Do Projects

But in that boredom, school fell into the background and was mostly forgotten by students. Online voluntary learning participation was mixed.

However, students were not idle. Because indoor, high-density and high-contact jobs were thrown to the wayside, students found more fulfilling outdoor projects to keep them engaged with the world. Paul’s grandparents owned a farm in Shelby, Iowa. “It’s not an official job,” Paul said, “but I go out there and help fix fences, spray weeds...and do any projects they have.” She noted it’s a good escape from the city. “The farm feels like the most normal place I could be during a pandemic, because I don’t expect to run into anyone like I would in Des Moines.”

Junior Nic Zimmerman took up small landscaping jobs in his neighborhood, almost as much to pass the time as to make money. Zimmerman offered everything from general lawn care to making 240 square foot dirt beds for trees. “It’s just me and

WORK ORDER

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113

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