Virus Testing...from Page 1A

presently available to let people know if they've been previously infected by the virus, but Palmer noted that blood banks around the state are requesting donations from COVID-19 survivors for use in coronavirus treatments.

While Palmer doesn't believe the Towns County site will get swamped, he is currently in a wait-and-see mode and will have a greater understanding once the scheduling of appointments is underway.

And whenever they have a better grasp of the area's demand for testing, adjustments to the site schedule and changes to the number of employees could be around the corner.

In the meantime, Palmer urges the public to follow social distancing guidelines and continue to wash their hands regularly. He also suggested using a designated family member to run errands instead of going out as a group.

"That limits the number of people that could get exposed," he said. "Right now, we're still in that mitigation phase where we're trying to stop the spread, so anything we can do not to expose ourselves makes us better off."

In closing, Palmer acknowledged that his mother resides in an assisted living facility that's currently under lockdown, so he understands the struggles of being separated from family members during the pandemic.

"I know it's hard when you have loved ones that you can't see, who you're used to visiting frequently," he said. "You can try to FaceTime or call them on the phone more often, just things like that really help.

"You can also use mail or email to send them pictures so they don't feel so isolated away from everyone."

For more information or for a referral, call the Union County Health Department at 706-745-6292 or the Towns County Health Department at 706-896-2265.

"Effective immediately, all symptomatic individuals will be eligible for COVID-19 testing," Public Health said recently. "Health care workers, first responders, law enforcement and long-term care facility residents and staff will still be prioritized for testing regardless of whether they are or are not symptomatic."

CodeRED...from Page 1A

go in the United States, you are going to be able to get a CodeRED message.

"So, if I went to Tennessee and am driving through an area that's got a CodeRED message, that thing will pop up on my app. Another good thing about the app is that you can choose which alerts you want, which notifications you want to receive.

"Now, you don't have to have the app – you can have the same old system that we've always had, but it's just another added feature."

Put another way, residents who choose to use the app will be able to receive notifications within a certain mile radius of their devices. For example, a part-time resident would be able to receive relevant alerts wherever they're residing.

Another CodeRED benefit is that first responders will be able to utilize the app to launch notifications while active in the field, which will come in handy at vehicle crash scenes where authorities want to warn the public of traffic conditions.

Other CodeRED alert examples include federal IPAWS messages like AMBER Alerts, weather notifications by the National Weather Service, and locally issued community alerts for things like traffic delays for area events or to relay new CDC guidelines pertaining to COVID-19.

All local first responder agencies will be able to send CodeRED alerts to people who opt to receive them, and where applicable, the alerts can be highly tailored to specific areas and neighborhoods.

Dyer said that, for example, if a hazardous materials spill were to occur somewhere in the county, first responders could get that message out to people within a certain mile radius of the accident to let them know to stay away the scene.

"So, if you're on the other side of town, you might not know anything about this, but as soon as you drive into that radius, it will alert you to avoid the area because of this incident," Dyer said. "It does a lot of things that we can do with our system now, this just has added benefits for the same cost."

Signups for the CodeRED alert system will be available soon, to include text-to-enroll, in-app signups and online applications, so keep an eye on the county website at unioncountyga.gov for more information.

"I think it's very important that residents sign up, because this is the quickest, easiest way to gain information on emergencies in the area," Dyer said. "People can get on a computer or social media or watch the news, but this is local, and it's true, trusted information that's provided.

"Plus, if they've got the app, they can go anywhere in the United States and still get emergency alerts exactly where they are (in areas that use CodeRED)."

Virus Spread...from Page 1A

health conditions.

Chronic medical conditions and advanced age contribute greatly to a person's risk of dying from the disease, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This means entire communities – young and old, healthy and sick alike – must do their part in limiting the spread of COVID-19 to protect everyone, and especially the most vulnerable members of society.

Union has experienced a jump in cases over the last three weeks, following its first three reported cases of COVID-19 announced April 7. Previously, an earlier case from Towns County had been misattributed by the Department of Public Health.

Also last week, the Georgia Department of Community Health reported that, as of April 23, one employee at the Union County Nursing Home had tested positive for COVID-19. As of the April 24 briefing, there were no additional reported cases among employees.

However, on Monday, April 27, a relative of a nursing home resident reached out to the newspaper to say the Health System had started contacting family members Sunday to alert them to a positive coronavirus test for a resident, who had since been moved.

It was unknown at press time if the positive cases in the employee and resident were connected, and the Health System declined to comment further on whether or not employees and residents were being mass tested at this time.

"We follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Department of Public Health and Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services guidelines for any required reporting," the Health System said. "Anyone who is identified during this pandemic as a potential exposure within our system is notified and Georgia DPH guidelines are followed.

"Any community contacts are researched and contacted via the Georgia DPH epidemiologists. We are working hard to navigate these difficult times to keep our employees and patients safe, while also respecting their privacy with their personal health."

Residents of long-term care facilities are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, with upwards of 20 percent of novel coronavirus deaths in the U.S. to date having occurred in nursing homes, according to a survey of state data compiled by ABC News.

"Given their congregate nature and resident population served (e.g., older adults often with underlying chronic medical conditions), nursing home populations are at the highest risk of being affected by COVID-19," the CDC said. "If infected with SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, residents are at increased risk of serious illness."

Georgia National Guard troops visited the Union County Nursing Home April 23 for a prescheduled cleaning of the facility, and they returned April 25 to clean Union General Hospital.

The National Guard cleaned the hospital and nursing home in Towns County also, where a resident of Chatuge Regional Nursing Home in Hiawassee tested positive for COVID-19 last week.

Armed Robbery...from Page 1A

handgun and demanded money from the clerk on duty, Baxter said.

Fortunately, no one was hurt, but the robber did make off with an undisclosed amount of cash.

A Blairsville Police officer arrived at the store within 30 seconds of being contacted by E-911 dispatchers, but the robber had already left the premises, Baxter said, noting that his department is still investigating the man's means of escape.

The Union County Sheriff's Office responded to the scene as well and acted as backup that evening.

Baxter posted images from security cam footage to Facebook Sunday, asking people to "please contact us through messenger or give us a call at 706-835-1692" if they recognized the person. Tipsters can also call the 24/7 nonemergency number at 706-439-6038.

"The thing I'd like for the public to concentrate on is that shirt," Baxter said, speaking of the dark-colored T-shirt with the letters "RVCA" on the back. "It's got a distinct label, and I feel like that's going to be the main lead that we get off of it, is somebody recognizing that shirt."

Added Baxter, "Somebody knows something, and we need their help."

It's been several years since Blairsville had an armed robbery, Baxter said, and this one is complicated by the fact that wearing masks and gloves in public is the new normal.

"With everything going on right now, it's tough," Baxter said. "As the public will be able to tell, some of the criminals are going to take advantage of the mask and glove thing."

For the person who committed the robbery, Baxter has a message, which he delivered on Facebook Sunday:

This armed robber took advantage of new COVID-19 guidelines regarding masks in public to enter the Circle K and stand in line without arousing suspicion Saturday night.
Photo/Security Camera

"If you're the dude in the shirt and you're reading this, I got some bad news for you: we're coming."