

Molinaro orders PODs at DC Jail to be repurposed as emergency shelters

Ongoing State of Emergency declaration in response to rising cases of coronavirus in county

As part of Dutchess County Government's ongoing response to the coronavirus/COVID-19 health emergency, County Executive Marcus Molinaro has issued an emergency order allowing the previously vacant temporary housing units (PODs) at the Dutchess County Law Enforcement Center and Jail campus to be repurposed as emergency shelters for those in need starting this evening.

County Executive Molinaro said, "We are repurposing the vacant PODs at the Law Enforcement Center and Jail campus to be used as shelters for the homeless. We are utilizing every resource at our disposal to respond quickly and effectively to this rapidly evolving health situation. Since social distancing is almost impossible at most homeless shelters, we can use the dormitory-style PODs to help create necessary space to help prevent the further spread of this illness and increase our ability to respond to cases within the homeless population as needed. We are grateful to Andrew O'Grady at Mental Health America, Christa Hines at Hudson River Housing, and Brian Riddell at Dutchess Outreach for making this need come to fruition and to Sheriff Butch Anderson for his swift action to open the PODs to the community during this emergency."

Dutchess County has partnered with Hudson River Housing (HRH) and Mental Health America (MHA) to operate one of

the two modular, dormitory-style buildings, which will be divided into male and female sections, allowing for more social distancing among the shelter clients. The facility has a capacity for up to 100 individuals, including 48 female beds and 52 male beds. The County has also partnered with Dutchess Outreach to provide food service.

There is a separate entrance to the property for shelter clients and staff, with physical barriers between the shelter and the jail for additional security. If needed, an additional POD will be opened as an alternate care facility should any homeless individual need treatment or care.

This executive order follows the County Executive's recent State of Emergency declaration, which allows for the designation of emergency shelters, medical shelters, and community-based care centers.

Dutchess County Sheriff Adrian "Butch" Anderson said, "We believe in treating others the way we would like to be treated. The Dutchess County Sheriff's Office is proud to help support our community, especially during this difficult time."

The PODs were opened in 2015 to temporarily house inmates previously boarded in other counties as a cost savings measure. The PODs have been vacant since early January following the county's significant work to reduce the population at the jail through restorative justice programs and the implementation of the State's Bail Reform legislation.

Dutchess County Government continues to provide residents the most current information and guidance on its website, www.dutchessny.gov/coronavirus, its Coronavirus hotline, (845) 486-3555, and its Facebook and Twitter accounts.

DC Stabilization Center switching to telepractice due to coronavirus crisis

Effective immediately, the Dutchess County Stabilization Center, the cornerstone of the county's mental health and addiction services programs, will operate exclusively via phone and telepractice. The facility will continue to operate all day and night every day, but won't be accepting in-person visits until further notice. These steps are being taken to help "flatten the curve" and stop the spread of COVID-19 in the community.

The Stabilization Center is a 24/7, non-medical, voluntary center for individuals experiencing crisis resulting from mental health or substance abuse issues.

The Stabilization Center has established a central phone number for individuals in crisis to call: (845) 486-2849. Department of Behavioral & Community Health's and partner agency mental health experts will be available to do assessments, referrals, and do hand offs over the phone. Individuals will also continue to receive follow-up and monitoring from staff to ensure success after their call. The Stabilization Center is a 24/7, non-medical, voluntary center for individuals experiencing crisis resulting from mental health or substance abuse issues.

Dutchess County Executive Marc Molinaro said, "The Stabilization Center is open and operating - we remain committed to supporting and providing help 24/7 to whoever may need it. However, we must change how we are operating to ensure the health and safety of both those who need our services and the dedicated individuals providing those services. Shifting to telepractice and ending in-person visitations to the Stabilization Center is necessary as we try to limit physical interactions to help stop the spread of coronavirus."

"While we are doing all we can to practice good social distancing, it's imperative we don't begin practicing emotional dis-

tancing. We won't let a pandemic stop our efforts at 'Breaking Through' the stigma surrounding addiction and helping individuals struggling with substance abuse, and their families, feel comfortable to seek treatment," continued Molinaro.

Dr. Jacqueline Johnson, DSW, LCSW-R, the Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Behavioral & Community Health said, "The vast majority of services offered at the Stabilization Center remain available to residents in crisis. We will continue to offer crisis counseling, peer advocacy, youth and family counseling, addiction and substance use counseling, and still make warm handoffs to connect patients with community-based resources."

Individuals are also reminded that they can always call or text HELPLINE at (845) 486-9700, which connects individuals with trained mental health professionals who can counsel or offer referrals to those dealing with mental health or substance use issues - 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

Dutchess County's 24/7 Mobile Crisis Intervention Team (MCIT) will also move to operating via phone and telepractice. While they will not be available to enter people's homes, they will assist law enforcement with crisis calls and link to services. This will ensure Dutchess County continues to connect individuals with behavioral health or substance use issues with immediate assistance in order to de-escalate crisis and plan for ongoing services.

Residents who have concerns regarding COVID-19/Coronavirus are encouraged to visit DutchessNY.gov/Coronavirus or call the Coronavirus Hotline at (845) 486-3555. This is an evolving situation, and county leaders will continue to update the public with the most current information and ongoing updates.

TOPS OFFERS SPECIAL HOURS FOR SENIOR POPULATION

Tops Friendly Markets are addressing the concerns of the most vulnerable population, seniors 60 years of age and older. Until further notice, Tops will open its doors for this select audience only, allowing them to shop from 6 to 7:30 a.m. every Tuesday and Thursday. Staff will not be asking for identification, as they trust the community will not abuse this privilege.

Tops also has curbside and pickup delivery as an alternate shopping solution. Visit Topsmarkets.com to shop online.

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Dutchess County's Rapid Response Team helping businesses network

by Rich Thomaselli

Ron Hicks said he's not ashamed. Not ashamed in the least.

"When I'm on the phone with our small business owners," he said, his voice breaking, "it's hard not to cry."

But Hicks, the assistant Dutchess County Executive to Marc Molinaro, is more than just an empathetic ear, more than just taking the concerns and frustrations of small business owners to heart. He's helping lead the charge to take action in the wake of the devastating effects of the spread of the coronavirus in the county by teaming with various other entities and implementing the Rapid Response Team.

A combination of county agencies, chambers of commerce, tourism councils, the Alliance For Business, Community Capital of New York and more, the Rapid Response Team was a creation of Molinaro after he first took office in 2011. It has been used twice in nine years - in 2014, when IBM had a layoff of more than 500 people, and in 2016 when The Gap distribution center in Fishkill suffered a massive fire and displaced 1,200 workers.

Hicks knows he's facing his biggest challenge now as the rapid growth of the COVID-19 virus forced Gov. Andrew Cuomo to literally shut down the state. With the exception of designated businesses such as banks, restaurants (takeout only) and grocery stores, business is closed as people are confined to their homes to help halt the spread of the virus. No barbershops, nail salons, movie theaters. No clothing stores, dress shops, hardware stores.

Business owners devastated. Employees

out of jobs and swamping the unemployment system. Now is the time for the oldest business tactic in the book - networking.

"We focus on communication, being on site, understanding the needs of the business in terms of what they need now and what they need going forward," Hicks said.

So with the cooperation of all of the aforementioned agencies, the Rapid Response Team formulated an initiative to connect all the parties involved from owners to employees.

"We got all the partners to give up their database emails," Hicks said. "We reached out to the small business associations, put them into one protected database and we push out a daily email of what's going on."

In barely a week since the Rapid Response Team was engaged, there are more than 8,400 subscribers to the email. The state of Connecticut, a border state to several New York counties, greatly assisted the state of New York by including it in its application for small business loans.

"We needed to communicate," Hicks said, "because let's face it, this is unprecedented that almost every business is affected."

Many of those businesses are travel-related, and Dutchess Tourism Inc. is closely monitoring the pandemic as it relates to New York and Dutchess County.

"Our top priority is the safety, health, and well-being of our community, its residents and visitors. This is a rapidly evolving situation that changes by the hour and there is a lot of uncertainty," Dutchess Tourism president Mary Kay Vrba said in a statement to the Southern Dutchess News. "We are collaborating with the Think Dutchess Alliance for Business to provide resources for tourism

business and their employees. Our team is in regular contact with the State Tourism Office (ILNY) and monitoring weekly messages from Destinations International and the U.S. Travel Association to stay informed on the latest updates as it relates to travel. When given the word we will be fully prepared to market our storied experiences to invite visitors to come and enjoy the summer in Dutchess County."

Hicks said Molinaro understands the concerns and the fears more than anybody.

"My boss is running a business as well, with 1,700 employees and a budget that's going to be wiped out. This county relies on sales tax revenue and that has hit us hard," Hicks said referring to county employees and the county budget. "He's telling people we have to knock this down now. I don't know what the official word is, but I'm looking at June 1 as a moment when we're not working 20 hours a day and not in isolated locations."



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