

Arvig announces free internet for students during COVID-19

Monday, March 16: Arvig announced they are offering an Education Assistance Program for families with a student in the K-12 system or for college students to receive free internet service, so their education can continue via e-learning methodologies in the event schools remain closed for COVID-19.

“Keeping people connected to the world has always been our mission,” said David Arvig, vice president and chief operating officer at Arvig. “We signed the Federal Communications Commission’s pledge to Keep America Connected during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak across the country, and we are committed to doing what we can to help families.”

The Arvig Education Assistance Program: is available to families who live in the Arvig service area and currently do not have any internet service at their residence; provides any internet speed available free-of-charge, including wi-fi service if needed; ensures service will remain free until the 2019-20 school year concludes unless the customer calls to disconnect their service and returns the equipment; will prioritize service installations for customers considered low-income who qualify for this program; and is available where Arvig can deliver 5 Mbps of speed or higher. To qualify for free service, the participant must be a new customer; have no bad debt with Arvig, and sign up for paperless statements. Go online to www.arvig.com via online chat or by call 1-888-992-7844 and ask about it.

DFL Party cancels conventions, moves to online balloting

Tuesday, March 17: Last night, an emergency meeting of the Minnesota DFL Party Executive Committee made the decision to cancel all local conventions and proceed with the endorsement and resolutions process via an online balloting system. This decision was made to ensure all DFL Party events are in compliance with advice from public health officials to cease small group gatherings.

No decision has yet been made regarding the Minnesota DFL state convention.

“In light of the recent guidance from the CDC and the State of Minnesota, the Minnesota DFL Party’s executive committee made the decision to have the business of all of our conventions conducted by an online balloting system,” said Ken Martin, chairman of the Minnesota DFL. “We understand the challenges this poses, but we believe this process preserves the power of grassroots activists to decide who our party supports and what our party stands for while simultaneously protecting the health and well-being of Minnesotans everywhere.”

“The cancellation of DFL conventions in favor of an online balloting system was not an easy decision to come to, but it is imperative that we all step up and do our part to protect our communities,” added Martin.

The Minnesota DFL will prohibit any official DFL-sponsored event, at all levels in the party, where more than 10 people would gather in person from Saturday, March 14, to Thursday, May 28. At this point the DFL state convention is still being planned as an in-person event, though that may change those plans based on further guidance from federal, state, and local officials and public health agencies.

Stearns Veteran Services suspends Paynesville visits

Tuesday, March 17: Effective Tuesday, March 17, to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus, Stearns County Veteran Services office is suspending in-person meetings with clients until further notice. “Our objective is to offer as many services as possible without face-to-face contact. We will do our best to schedule phone appointments as needed or to address needs through the mail. Please keep in mind that many of the stakeholders we are working with are also in the process of implementing similar policies. We are working together to find the best possible solutions that effectively comply with efforts to slow the spread of COVID-19 while also minimizing the impact on our clients,” they announced.

“We are also suspending regular outreach activities until further notice,” they added. This suspended outreach activity includes: at the Paynesville American Legion, on the second Thursday of each month from 1 to 4 p.m.

To contact the Stearns County Veterans Service office in Waite Park, call 320-656-6176 or email veteran.benefits@co.stearns.mn.us. To contact the Melrose office, call 320-256-2435. Please include your name, phone number, and a brief message for staff.

Stearns County cancels jail visitation for the 30 days

Friday, March 13: The Stearns County Jail has cancelled all public inmate visitation for the next 30 days to aid in the prevention of the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19). “We are working with our inmate phone system provider to give each inmate one free phone call up to 20 minutes in length a week to communicate with friends and family while visitation is suspended. We will keep you informed of any further updates and/or changes regarding jail visitation,” they announced.

Congressional delegation urges small business assistance

Thursday, March 19: Sen. Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith, and Rep. Jim Hagedorn (District 1), Angie Craig (District 2), Dean Phillips (District 3), Betty McCollum (District 4), Ilhan Omar (District 5), Tom Emmer (District 6), Collin Peterson (District 7), and Pete Stauber (District 8) wrote a letter to Small Business Administration administrator Jovita Carranza calling on the Small Business Administration to provide assistance in the form of SBA Economic Injury Disaster Loans for Minnesota businesses following significant economic impacts from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has already had a significant impact on small businesses throughout Minnesota – including those in and associated with the hospitality, educational support, retail, and restaurant industries. The measures necessary to help prevent the spread of the COVID-19 have resulted in canceled events, closures of schools and businesses, and a dramatic decline in revenues in key sectors of our economy,” states the letter. “We have heard directly from Minnesota small business owners about the substantial losses that they are now facing due to the COVID-19 disaster, which is causing extensive economic damage in our state and which necessitates financial assistance from the federal government. Thank you for your attention to this critical request. We look forward to working with you to protect our small businesses.”

Stearns County parks and trails remain open for use

Thursday, March 19: Stearns County parks and recreational trails provide a space for people to practice social distancing while benefiting physically, mentally, and emotionally.

- All parks and trails will remain open for public use.
- All visitors to Quarry Park in Waite Park are asked to use the self-serve paybox (cash or check only) to purchase your parking pass. The self-serve paybox is located at the entrance to the park. You can purchase your annual parking pass online at www.co.stearns.mn.us/Recreation/BuyQuarryParkPermit.
- All programs, meetings, events, and volunteer opportunities are either postponed or cancelled through Friday, April 3. No new reservations or event applications will be accepted through Thursday, April 30. Stearns County is accepting reservations and event applications that will occur after Friday, May 1.
- All restroom facilities will remain open. The Stearns County Parks Department has increased cleaning efforts in addition to regular maintenance activities and have implemented best practices to help prevent the spread of viruses.
- All park/trail maps and comment boxes have been removed. Park and trail maps are posted on the informational kiosks for viewing only. Park and trail users are encouraged to utilize online maps from Avenza Maps, a free app.

Sheriff's Office closing lobby to the public starting Friday

Thursday, March 19: In an on-going effort to reduce and mitigate risk to staff at the Stearns County Sheriff Office, and in general common practice with the rest of the county as it relates to COVID-19 concerns, the following changes have been made to certain operations of the Stearns County Sheriff’s Office, starting at 8 a.m. on Friday, March 20.

- The Law Enforcement Center (LEC) lobby will be closed to the general public from Mondays through Fridays, except for Tuesdays and Thursdays for gun permit applications.
- All other business, including data requests, can be conducted via telephone 320-259-3700 or email to sheriff.records@co.stearns.mn.us.
- Permit-to-carry applications will be accepted on Tuesdays from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. and on Thursdays from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Applications must be complete and include a clear copy of your driver’s license. Please have the correct fee, as the sheriff’s office is unable to make change. It accepts cash or check.
- Permit-to-purchase applications will be accepted during those Tuesday and Thursday hours as well; however, the sheriff’s office highly encourage permit-to-purchase applications be sent by mail to: Stearns County Sheriff’s Office; Attn: Gun Permits; 807 Courthouse Square; St. Cloud, MN 56303. A clear copy of your driver’s license is required for these applications.
- The sheriff’s office is suspending all civil process service except for: emergency court orders; orders for protection; harassment restraining orders; and orders deemed necessary to be served by the judicial system.