Caption: Kevin Boys, President at Southern State Community College

Coming Together to Preserve What We Love About Highland County

By Kevin Boys, President - Southern State Community College

One of the attractions of Ohio's smaller cities and towns is that we happily lack some of the challenges of our state's larger metro areas, starting with the higher cost of living, traffic congestion and simply the lack of the same sense of community we enjoy here in Hillsboro and throughout the five counties we serve. There are certainly challenges unique to Ohio's smaller communities, but even with these, places like Highland County possess an attractive quality of life that few would trade.

That attraction is dimming right now on the health front, however, and the data does not look good. Recently Highland County's rate of infection has been higher than Cleveland's Cuyahoga County and Columbus' Franklin County, and just barely better than Cincinnati's Hamilton County.

It should be a wake-up call for us all. It's time to strengthen our resolve.

Not only is the rising number of cases causing human suffering and stretching our health care system, but it's bound to impact local employers. Rising absenteeism threatens to begin interfering with employers' ability to operate, at a time when they are already under enormous strain from the economic headwinds caused by the pandemic.

As the leader of one of Ohio's 23 community colleges, I am proud of the strong track record that Southern State has in preparing southern Ohioans for success in careers—careers that help our students of all ages and their families improve their quality of life and futures. Our graduates who are working out in our schools, hospitals, manufacturers and other workplaces can only do so if they stay healthy. That's where we all come in.

Southern State and Ohio's other community colleges have come together with some of Ohio's largest businesses to support the "Stop The Spread" campaign and help get the word out about what we all need to do to stay healthy and safe right now. At our College, we have been most successful at minimizing the spread by observing the practices we've outlined in our own mini-campaign: Mask up, Wash up, and Back up! And now more than ever, it's increasingly important to avoid large groups of people that we don't live with. That's really hard to think about with the holidays fast approaching. I'm dealing with it in this way… I'll work and pray for my family and loved ones to be able to celebrate NEXT year.

We have all heard this before—I am just as weary of hearing it as everyone else—but the facts remain: we need to stay healthy if we want to be able to keep providing for our families, and also if we want the businesses that are the lifeblood of our communities to be able to operate.

I am very heartened that vaccines against the virus will be here soon. It is an encouraging bit of good news in a year that has not seen very much of it. We are not out of the woods yet, however, and we will not be for several more months. Until then, we need to simply be disciplined about doing what we know works, what's responsible, and what we know will keep ourselves and our families safe and our businesses and schools open.

So far in our state, more than 7,000 people have died, more than 30,000 have had to be hospitalized and approximately 470,000 have become sick—and by the time you read this these numbers will have gone up even more. But these are just numbers, that is, until one of them is a good friend and colleague, a beloved family member, or just this week, a Southern State nursing graduate.

We can change the outcomes going forward, however, by each doing our part. When I think about the sacrifices other, previous generations of Americans endured to preserve the strengths of our great nation, I know that we can do this. You can too.

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