

All buildings have one entry and one exit

**EMPLOYEES continued
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“We have had a lot of inquiries regarding an opening date for the coffee cart,” he said. “At this time, we are taking precautions that directly relate to the safety procedures we are implementing as a Tribal government. I will continue to evaluate procedures as we move forward in order to open the coffee cart at an appropriate time. I know coffee is considered essential for many of us.”

Signs regarding social distancing and encouraging mask wearing when interacting with others were posted on various department doors. All buildings now have one entry and one exit to help ensure employees are complying with temperature check requirements.

Medical-grade hand sanitizer, along with cleaning supplies and masks, were distributed to every department. Additionally, employees are provided a mask as needed at the initial temperature check station.

Employees seemed to take the changes in stride.

Spirit Mountain Community Fund Grants Coordinator Jim Holmes was one of a handful of employees whose work dictated that they mostly remain on site rather than work remotely during the partial closure that began in mid-March.

“I’m excited to see a lot of my co-workers back and I hope that functions like the employee recognition celebration can (still) find a way to honor the many years of service that people have put in,” he said.

Holmes said he was happy to see the gym available once again for employee use.

“I’ve been doing my best to practice social distancing and will follow the new guidelines as I believe it is still very important to keep this community and everyone who works here safe,” he said.

In keeping with the new regulations, there will not be an on-site Community Fund quarterly check presentation in June.

“We’ll have to hold out hope for September,” Holmes said. “A lot of the organizations were disappointed that they would not be coming out for the ceremony, but understood the circumstances.”



Photos by Timothy J. Gonzalez

Tribal Court Program Coordinator Ramona Quenelle has her temperature taken and is asked screening questions as she enters the Governance Center on the first day back to work on Monday, May 18. Smoke Signals Social Media/Digital journalist Kamiah Koch waits in the background. It was the first day back to work for many of the more than 500 Tribal government employees since mid-March.



The thermal scanning device used to assess Tribal employees while having their temperatures taken as they enter the Governance Center.

When employees first arrived at their respective offices, waiting for them was a care package that contained candy, a coffee cup, mask and a laminated “quick reference” office protocol. On the front was a note explaining some of the new regulations.

“Your work area probably felt very different when you arrived today,” it said. “Please know that the changes you are experiencing are meant to keep you, our guests and the community safe as we re-open our doors. While the precautions put in place have saved lives, it will be critical for each of us to continue to practice social distancing and other safety protocols.”

Human Resources continued to reach out to employees during their

first week back to ensure they understood the new guidelines.

For example, some thought that the temperature check stations included photographs, retinal scans or stored information about employees, but were assured that it was merely a no-contact device for measuring temperature.

“It is important for employees to work together to adhere to the new safety protocols in order to protect the health of employees, members, visitors and our community,” Human Resources Director Camille Mercier said. “Staff understand we are in the first phase of returning to work during a pandemic and have been very cooperative and helpful while we adjust to this ‘new normal’ way of reporting to work and taking extra care to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace.”

Danielle Murrell serves as the Tribe’s Domestic Violence Program coordinator. On her first day back, she immediately noticed everyone wearing masks as they exited their vehicles, as well as the new, red COVID-19 social distancing signs on the doors.

Murrell, who works at the Community Center, also was required to go through the lobby instead of

the usual entrance, as were other employees, to have their temperatures taken.

“It was also a big change walking toward my office,” she said. “The lobby was obviously more quiet than usual, and seeing Darla (Patterson) at the front desk with her mask on (was different) as well. Normally most employees are coming into work around the same time, with morning greetings and getting coffee, but now you just head straight to your office.”

Murrell said the biggest changes she noticed were the lack of socializing, such as meeting co-workers in the hall for a quick chat and having to think about things that she normally wouldn’t have to consider.

“I needed to remember to put on my mask every time I left my office, washing my hands a gazillion times, going to the restroom and making sure no one else is in there, and doing the same protocol in the kitchen to prepare my lunch as well,” she said.

Other changes include always having paper towels on hand to avoid touching high-contact surfaces, being shown forms by co-workers instead of them handing those to her and checking with the front desk to ensure it was OK to grab copies from the copy machine.

“In the grand scheme of the things, these little changes we need to make are not a big deal and really are not that difficult at all, just an adjustment,” Murrell said.

Central Phones Receptionists Scarlett Holtz and Katherine Warren said that the biggest difference in their jobs post-COVID-19 is the lack of calls and foot traffic. They now work behind sheets of plastic to protect them from airborne particles.

“Everything is by appointment only and the phones are a lot quieter,” Holtz said. “Normally, we would be getting close to 100 calls already today. I think we’ve only had 20 so far.”

Another change is not having popcorn or coffee served in the reception area.

“Tribal Council members usually come out to get popcorn and chat, but now everyone is going right into their offices,” Warren said. “It’s really quiet out here.” ■



Youth Tobacco Prevention Coordinator Shannon Stanton wears a mask while staffing a station where Tribal employees have their temperature taken and are asked screening questions as they enter the Governance Center on the first day back to work.



Signs on one of the doors at the Governance Center.