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First school day is a safe one

Manatee County schools reopen with COVID-19 concerns

By Ryan McKinnon
Sarasota Herald-Tribune
USA TODAY NETWORK

It's been 158 days since students set foot in a Manatee County classroom, and the King Middle School students waiting for the bus to pick them up Monday morning were ready.

COVID-19 safety precautions may have dominated the adult conversation about reopening schools, but the middle-schoolers on 15th Street East in the Samoset area were talking about how bored they had been at home and how they couldn't wait to see their classmates.

Most of all, they were ready



Southeast High School freshmen Jaylei Gimbel, left, and Aisha King walk to school on the first day of class for students in Manatee County. [HERALD-TRIBUNE STAFF PHOTO / MIKE LANG]

for the semblance of normalcy that the first day of school brings — teachers, schedules and structure.

"We have distractions at home that we don't have

at school," said Jeremiah Williams, 12. "Say you have video games and online schooling. I'm going to do the

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DeSantis on coronavirus: 'Great work, Florida'

By James Call
USA TODAY NETWORK-
Florida Capital Bureau

On a day when Florida reported fewer than 3,000 new cases, Gov. Ron DeSantis went on the offensive to push a good-news storyline in Florida's fight against the novel coronavirus.

DeSantis used an email blast, Twitter and remarks in a Panama City appearance Monday to focus on the decrease in new cases and the increased availability of hospital beds.

The daily coronavirus numbers release by the



Eduardo Casades of Stockton has his nose swabbed at the free coronavirus testing event sponsored by El Concilio at the First Baptist Church in Lodi. [CLIFFORD OTO/THE STOCKTON RECORD]

state Department of Health, usually before noon, was delayed that same day until

See DESANTIS, A8

ANALYSIS

DNC lineup of powerful women underscores gender gap in politics

By Craig Gilbert
Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
USA TODAY NETWORK

Former first lady Michelle Obama was the headline attraction Monday night at a Democratic Convention that will showcase a long list of women with marquee roles in politics, from Kamala Harris to Nancy Pelosi to Elizabeth Warren to Hillary Clinton to Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

Those names underscore the far greater prominence of women in the Democratic Party compared with the GOP, a gender gap that also extends to the voting behavior of Americans and to public opinion about President Donald Trump.

The partisan gender gap is especially wide in Wisconsin, some pollsters say. And it has widened in Wisconsin to the point where women now account for two out of every

See DNC, A5



(Top from left) House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and former first lady Michelle Obama. (Bottom from left) Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Sen. Kamala Harris. [WIRES VIA USA TODAY]

Primary could affect local coronavirus response

By Zac Anderson
Sarasota Herald-Tribune
USA TODAY NETWORK

Maybe no issue in the country has been more intensely debated lately than the question of whether to reopen schools.

On Tuesday, voters in both Sarasota and Manatee counties will decide who they want making coronavirus-related school opening and closing decisions going forward.

The most consequential outcome of Tuesday's primary election may be who wins the four local school board contests, or advances to November if nobody reaches 50% in the five-candidate District 3 Manatee race. But voters in the two-county region also will be electing leaders to other key local offices that could make critical decisions about the coronavirus response.

In Manatee County, two GOP County Commission candidates who have been more supportive of public health mandates to contain the virus are squaring off against two Republican challengers who oppose such measures. The primary may decide whether the county's mask mandate remains.

Sarasota County also has two competitive GOP primaries for County Commission.

See RESPONSE, A5

Coronavirus hits Sarasota-Manatee tourism hard

By Laura Finaldi
Sarasota Herald-Tribune
USA TODAY NETWORK

Tourism in Sarasota County plummeted in April, May and June, the same time period when Florida as a whole saw a 60.5% drop in visitation.

In the three months ending June 30, visitation in Sarasota fell by 67.9%, with the number of visitors falling to 111,800 compared to 348,000 in the same three months the year before.

Tourism was virtually nonexistent in April, when visitor numbers fell by 94.6%, from 132,700 in April 2019 to just 7,200 people in April 2020. In May, the area welcomed 35,200 tourists, down by 69.7%, from 116,000, and June visitation



Tourism in Sarasota and Manatee counties fell significantly at the onset of COVID-19, as it did in the entire state of Florida. [HERALD-TRIBUNE ARCHIVE / 2017]

dropped by 30.1%, from 99,300 to 69,400 people.

"April was the worst month in our history, and we had our worst quarter ever," Virginia Haley, president of Visit Sarasota County, said. "You started to see a little bit of pent-up demand in June, but it was still way down.

When (COVID-19) cases started spiking again, things backed off a little."

Coinciding with a drop in visitors, the county also saw major declines in hotel occupancy, which was 51% in June, compared to 63.8% in June 2019. May's occupancy was 21.7% and April's

was just 9.2%, compared to 75.2% in April the year before.

The average daily room rate fell by more than half from \$201.92 to \$94.92 in April and from \$165.74 to \$149.57 in May, but it essentially leveled off again in June, when it fell by just 0.6% from \$157.19 to \$156.18. Haley said this is an encouraging sign.

"The rates are about equal to where they were last year, which is important in terms of eventual recovery," she said. "If you start to bring business back on the basis of deep discounting, you are training customers to expect that discount, and they are reluctant to give that up."

In its last fiscal year,

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HEALTH + FITNESS
INSIDE

HIGH-TECH HOME GYMS

New devices use artificial intelligence, cameras and motion sensors to teach users how to lift weights properly

