



SIX MONTHS INTO COVID-19:

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

A SAIPAN TRIBUNE ADVERTISING SUPPLEMENT
2 JULY 2020

Businesses stay nimble to respond to new challenges

By BEA CABRERA
beacabrerasaipan@gmail.com
CORRESPONDENT

It was in mid-March when local businesses started to revamp hours or temporarily close in compliance with Gov. Ralph Torres' executive order 2020-4 declaring a public health emergency and then the Second Amended Executive Order 02-04 in the CNMI due to COVID-19 concerns. Businesses that pressed on were in the utilities, restaurant, food and grocery businesses—all considered essentials—and these establishments made the community function despite the many limitations.

Three months later and with the low number of COVID-19 cases in the CNMI, the Commonwealth is now on "Level Blue," which is just a step away from the safest level, which is "Green." The new level indicates fewer restrictions but with health and safety precautions still in place. That has allowed some businesses to adapt and do business in a new, and safe, way.

Tom Yum Restaurant launched an online service on Facebook that makes it easier for customers to order their take-out food. Just look for "Tom Yum Restaurant On-Line Service" and add it to your network. The page informs customers of current menu



KRIZEL TUAZON

The KFC/ Taco Bell along Beach Road has been reconfigured for the safety of employees and customers.

choices, prices, and "once one is ready to order, they can place their orders online or phone it in," Tom Yum manager Natalia Gvan said.

They also now accept dine-in via reservations. "We want to be accessible to our customers and be of service to them even in these times. We continue to do business and we are here to serve the same quality food," Gvan added.

The Shack Saipan has remained open since the start of the pandemic. The restaurant—akin to a highland bistro that specializes in French-style crepes and local cuisine—relies on the resiliency of the CNMI community. "...We have been through so much and we need to go back to our native mindset—one community made up of indi-

viduals that help one another," said owner Glen Hunter.

Saipan Mango Six Cafe temporarily closed for a month in order to prevent the spread of the COVID-19. Owner Sun Moon Ahn said that he and his employees used those times researching how to solve the safety problems of customers and employees. "Noticing that the pandemic situation here on Saipan has been a little safer and controlled by the government, we considered the requests of many of our regular customers to open and that is why we are ready to serve once again," he said.

Buffet-style restaurants went creative and did take-out "bentos" (to-go-meals) instead. Spicy Thai restaurant manager Jean Bracken said that they never closed

as they many residents have become friends and family. "When tough times come, it is important to help the people around us, even if it is just serving food. After Super Typhoon Yutu hit, we had a lot of people stop by to eat and use our generator to charge their electronics. We understand that this global pandemic has caused quite a big economic downturn, so to help our customers we try to provide quality food at an affordable price," Bracken added.

Another restaurant popular because of its buffet, Sura Saipan, did not close and has a line of bento meals, said general manager Michelle Park. "Whether it is a super typhoon or a pandemic, we are always here to serve our customers. ... We currently have three bento menu options and the buffet-style is suspended for now."

AC Pacific LLC president Alex B.K. Youn, who manages I Love Saipan stores and Star Sands Plaza, said that providing for the local community is always an important factor in their business portfolio. "...Our business is not making enough sales to meet the breakeven point, but we have the three stores open because we have to keep our employees on the payroll and, at the same time, give service to the community," he said.

Green Flash Dive Inc. a company that offers hydrotastic test and scuba diving and swimming lessons, gets many of its business from local divers right now. "...We have always been a business focused

on providing services to our local divers," said owner Rhea McDoulett. "We have been fortunate to serve local divers, as well as provide services to dive shops that need to have their equipment serviced while there are no customers. ... We have continued operations, except for a brief one-day pause when we understood there were no beaches open to the public," she added.

Many businesses that used to cater mainly to tourists like bed-and-breakfast places have opened their doors to residents, encouraging them to experience "staycations" at rates lower than their usual rates for tourists. QQ Car Rental, which is known for renting colorful, convertible Camaros, Jeeps, and trucks to tourists, is now offering reduced rental rates to residents.

At Everest Kitchen, it temporarily closed last March soon after the CNMI reported its first case of COVID-19. The management had the confidence to open again after all their employees tested negative for COVID-19, according to owner Laxmi Shrestha.

"While closed, we received a lot of calls, emails, and messages from our customers to open the restaurant. As soon as all our staff were able to get the COVID-19 test that gave negative results, we felt confident to open the restaurant without any risk to our staff and customers," she said.

A couple of new businesses opened despite the pandemic and its many restrictions. Friendly Plaza Supermarket

owner and president James Burke opened the new plaza with a supermarket, laundromat, and car rental last June 2. "I did not see the current circumstances as a hindrance and we remain to provide a variety of popular products for the public with friendly service."

On July 3, Paire' Corner, a gourmet and deli place on Tinian, will formally open. Operations manager and chef Rhea Backe said that they will not only be serving delicious food but also providing jobs to the Tinian community. "With this COVID-19 pandemic, students transitioning to college are looking for a source of income to support their education. We are grateful to be the bridge to achieve their goal, whether for college or career."

Many businesses like Kentucky Fried Chicken, Taco Bell, TanHoldings, Joeten, Great Harvest Bread Co., Monster Pizza, Puerto Rico Bento, and McDonald's have remained open, with some of them making donations to the community, particularly to the COVID-19 front-liners.

Joe Ayuyu Jr., McDonald's area supervisor for Guam and CNMI, said that he and his team are working hard to help McDonald's resume normal operations. "We are trying to do whatever is right for us and the customers, to [create a] safe and sanitized environment. ... The economy needs to open up because it is going to be hard for many people if we don't, but we need to get there the right way."

A look back and where are we now

MARCH 16

President Donald Trump declares a national emergency, opening access to up to \$50 billion in emergency relief funds to stop spread of COVID-19 in the United States and its territories.

Gov. Ralph DLG Torres signs Executive Order 02-04 declaring the CNMI under State of Significant Emergency and a State of Public Health Emergency.

MARCH 24

All businesses are to operate or open facilities from 6am to 1pm and public to adhere to social distancing practices.

MARCH 26

First batch of 14 inbound passengers underwent 14-day mandatory quarantine at Kanoa Resort in Susupe.

MARCH 28

Grocery stores and retail establishments' operating hours revised to 6am to 6pm and allowed at 50% capacity.

MARCH 30

Two test positive in the CNMI involving a 42-year-old male and a 49-year-old female.

First COVID-19 death in the

CNMI was a 70-year-old man who was in quarantine at Kanoa Resort.

Gov. Ralph DLG Torres orders a 7pm curfew for everybody.

APRIL 6

Beaches and pathways, docks and ramps are reopened from 6am to 6pm

APRIL 7

Second COVID-19 death in the CNMI involved a 77-year-old woman

APRIL 10

Commonwealth Healthcare Corp. starts building field hospital at the upper level parking lot of the hospital, to be used in case of a spike in the number of COVID-19 patients in the CNMI.

APRIL 14

11 COVID-19 cases, with eight in stable condition, one hospitalized at CHC, and two deaths

APRIL 15

20,000 COVID-19 test kits ordered from South Korea arrive.

APRIL 17

CHCC announces possibility of free mass testing in the CNMI

APRIL 18

14 confirmed COVID-19 cases in the CNMI, including nine recoveries and two deaths.

APRIL 22

More medical supplies arrive from Long Beach, California. Medical field hospital at CHCC is now called "Medical Care and Treatment Site."

APRIL 25

Governor's COVID-19 Task Force and CHCC opens schedule to the public to get COVID-19 free mass testing.

APRIL 29

CNMI had zero COVID-19 case after last individual who tested positive has recovered and was released from Kanoa Resort.

APRIL 30

Less than three days after the start of mass testing, a total of 224 individuals have already undergone testing in the CNMI.

MAY 2

United Airlines resumes Guam to Saipan flights.

MAY 4

948 persons have undergone

community based-testing at the Francisco C. Ada/Saipan International Airport.

Curfew (from 7pm to 6am) is eased to 10pm to 5am.

MAY 7

New COVID-19 case involving a 17-year old male, identified as a result of contract tracing, raising the number of CNMI cases to 15.

MAY 12

Three new COVID-19 cases involving three males—19, 15, and 27 years old, asymptomatic and contacts of previously diagnosed COVID-19 cases in the CNMI. So far, a total of 19 cases, five active cases, 12 recoveries, and two deaths.

MAY 14

Gov. Ralph DLG Torres announces proposed July 15 target to reopen the CNMI to tourists

MAY 18

Two new COVID-19 cases involving two males—22 and 31 years old—identified through contract tracing. CNMI numbers up to 21, with seven active cases, 12 recoveries, and two deaths.

MAY 19

Mass testing starts on Rota

at the Benjamin T. Manglona Airport and on Tinian at the Tinian Health Center.

MAY 20

CNMI efforts to flatten the curve remains strong as there are only 21 cases of COVID-19 since March.

MAY 22

One more tests positive involving a 27-year-old female contact of a previously diagnosed COVID-19 case in the CNMI. This raised the CNMI's total to 22.

The U.S. Small Business Administration approved \$34,902.12 loan under Paycheck Protection Program Aid in the CNMI.

MAY 24

CNMI government offices open to the public and operating under regular hours.

MAY 26

CNMI declared under "Level Yellow"—partial restaurant service open, curfew hours from 11pm to 5am and business hours from 5am to 10pm

MAY 28

10% of Saipan's population has undergone free mass testing at the Francisco C. Ada/Saipan International Airport.

JUNE 3

One tests positive for COVID-19, identified as a female passenger on the May 28 United Airlines flight from Guam that originated from the U.S. mainland. CNMI total now at 23.

JUNE 5

Three new cases add to the COVID-19 roster, now up at 26, with eight active cases, 16 recoveries, and two deaths.

JUNE 8

A passenger from the May 28 United Airlines flight from Guam test positive for COVID-19, raising the CNMI's COVID-19 cases to 27

JUNE 9

One passenger at quarantine site tests positive, boosting the CNMI's COVID-19 cases to 27

JUNE 10

Two more test positive. The CNMI now has a total of 30 COVID-19 cases.

JUNE 15

Community testing leaves its original site, the Francisco C. Ada/Saipan International Airport, to transition to villages to target community members with limited transportation.

See A LOOK on Next Page

Life at 'Level Blue'

By BEA CABRERA

beacabrerasaipan@gmail.com
CORRESPONDENT

A few days after the World Health Organization announced that the COVID-19 outbreak is a pandemic, Gov. Ralph DLG Torres declared the CNMI on March 16 under a State of Significant Emergency and a state of Public Health, in order to protect the health and safety of CNMI residents, businesses, and visitors.

Arlene Mafnas of Kagman said she found it a scary time "because suddenly everything was uncertain and we didn't know if the virus has reached the islands already. If you are scared, you tend to follow rules needed to secure you and your family's safety so even if I didn't entirely understand what was going on, I stocked up on food and medicine and stayed home."

Since then, the CNMI has seen many changes—in the way people shop for food, eat out, in being in public, etc., from restrictions in movement and standard practice, to precautionary measures such as wearing face masks and keeping at least 6 feet away from other people. Then the CNMI government implemented a five-color-coding scheme called Com-

munity Vulnerability, ranging from the highest, which is red, to green, which is the safest, to communicate to the public the current level of the CNMI's vulnerability to COVID-19.

"The color scheme wasn't introduced to the community until it was announced we were in 'Level Yellow' and now 'Blue.' The community vulnerability colors [enable] a regular person like me [to] have a clearer picture where the CNMI is currently and is able to respond properly," Mafnas added.

"Level Blue" means a partial resumption of international flights, increased building occupancy to allow establishments to open up to 75% of their original capacity, curfew is now from 12am to at 4am, partial restaurant and bar operations are now permitted at 50% of their originally permitted occupancy limit, and dine-in customers are allowed. All these still require establishments to enforce social distancing precautions and promote the wearing of face masks, in accordance with Bureau of Environmental Health rules.

Life at "Level Blue" is a being looked at as a time to acclimatize the CNMI to the opening up its borders

to flights, whether returning residents or tourists. At this level, the COVID-19 Task Force is expected to ready all mitigation measures in anticipation of the reinvigoration of the tourism industry.

"Of course, I am looking forward to moving to Level Green, which is the safest.

COMMUNITY VULNERABILITY

LEGEND:

- Red: Least safe
- Orange
- Yellow
- Blue
- Green: Safest

Source: Office of the Governor

It sounds like 'Green' represents the kind of lifestyle we had before the pandemic but I also know that [that isn't] so. This huge shift in our lives has affected families, employees, businesses and children and, while we think we can go back to the way things used to be, will many of us be able to say that after being terminated or furloughed or evicted out of your apartment?" said pilot Rick Markham.

"I think living the new

normal entails still wearing masks, observing proper hygiene whether at home or in public, and social distancing until we have a vaccine. Personally, the new normal requires us not to be complacent because even if we have a few cases here on island compared to other parts of the world, we can't be blindsided and throw away the chance that we had it good here when this pandemic started," Markham added.

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A LOOK

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tation and for workers who cannot leave work.

The CNMI moves to Level Blue, which now allows 75% occupancy, beach group gathering of 15 people, and curfew is adjusted from 12am to 4am.

JUNE 17

CHCC removes "recoveries" from

its dashboard of daily counts.

JUNE 22

Gov. Ralph DLG Torres announced that the CNMI has enough PPEs on hand to last it several months.

JUNE 29

COVID-19 cases on Saipan at 30, with active cases down to one and two deaths.

"Level Blue" in force. (Bea Cabrera)

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Brabu Pharmacy: We can never close

By BEA CABRERA
beacabrera@saipantribune.com
CORRESPONDENT

In the face of a raging COVID-19 pandemic, Brabu Pharmacy has remained true to its commitment to have the medicine the community needs, while staying vigilant about safety and health protocols. Now on its 11th year of service, your Brabu Pharmacy team is united more than ever to prioritize patients and their needs.

"We can never close and I really give my staff a lot of credit. They knew what they were signing up for and the people who have been here depending on the business for a long time. During one of our pep talks, we all agreed



From left, Rafferty Dris, Robby Taman, Ted Parker, Lila Calvo, Erica Leon Guerrero, Theresa Zheng, and Ruella Ichuio. BEA CABRERA

that we are going to take care of all of our patients in preparation when the virus reaches the Marianas," said pharmacy owner Ted Parker. He said that temporar-

ily closing the pharmacy was never an option "as this is what we have to do," while taking as many precautionary measures as they can.

Brabu sales representative Robby John A. Taman said that Ted and Kathy Parker were closely monitoring the COVID-19 situation in the U.S. mainland and the possible effects it will have in the CNMI. "They already knew that it would reach Saipan at some point and we had safety measures in our stores planned out so we were expecting it and were just waiting for the day when it will come. We had initial measures in place before Gov. [Ralph DLG] Torres released the directives," he said.

"The first month was really hectic. There was an overflow of workload as our patients tripled and there was a fear in the community that all pharmacies on island will run out of medicine and insurance companies will run out of coverage. At Brabu, we are glad we never experienced those and the companies that we worked with never left their clients hanging. ... We made sure that we have a good supply for patients every month," he added.

In terms of service, Brabu Pharmacy has broadened their efficiency. They deliver medicine to homes and businesses, created a drive-thru option or "Express Tent" for people who don't want to go inside the store, especially the elderly, and their other branches at MH2 Puerto Rico and Kagman are now open.

"We always extend our service, whether it is prescription or non-prescription medicine. ... The tent outside helps us limit the number of people inside the store as we continuously monitor the touch points such as pens, counters and door knobs. We want to make sure that they are sanitized, keeping them clean and safe so we can continue to provide Brabu service to all customers," Taman said.

He said they created the "Express Tent" outside the pharmacy so customers can call Brabu in advance about the medicine or items they need and a pharmacy staff will assist the customer outside and the whole transaction only takes three to five minutes. "This allows us to bring the items straight to

Continued on Next Page



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Brabu Pharmacy continues to disinfect touch points such as cashier areas, pens, and door knobs.

BEA CABRERA

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your car, instead of you having to come in to the store," Taman added.

Pharmacy technician Lila Mailman said that going to work everyday may entail a little more risk but Brabu Pharmacy is making it safe for employees and patients. "It was overwhelming in the beginning but it was like after Super Typhoon Yutu. We kept our head down and continued working. ... We take it day by day. We do our best and we try not to get flustered."

"We don't want anyone to go without medicine and we are available to give good

health care advice always. One of the reasons why we made Brabu safe is that many people right now just stay at home but if they know that the environment here is safe, they will keep coming," she added.

Customer service is a huge deal at Brabu Pharmacy, according to cashier Shianne Agulto. "I have made a few friends just tending to patients. There are some people who are open to making friends, [while] some people just come to get what they need. Either way, we try to engage so they will always feel comfortable whenever they are here," she said.

Parker stressed that the community can never let its guard down during this pandemic, no matter how many COVID-19 cases are here. "I see a lot of people becoming cavalier, starting to not do the social distancing and other safety protocols. Look

at the U.S. mainland. [It is not] only the elderly [that] are affected but even the young ones now. We have to stay vigilant and never let our guard down until we get through this," he said.

"In the event a vaccine becomes available, I imagine

the hospital will be quick to get the vaccination because it is their job. But as soon that will be available to outside places, Brabu Pharmacy will be happy to get it," he added.

Brabu Pharmacy Gualo Rai is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 6pm, with tele-

phone number (670) 233-2668. Brabu Pharmacy at MH II Branch is open Monday to Friday, from 8am to 12pm, (670) 322-4898, and Brabu Pharmacy Kagman Branch (next to Ling Lin Market) is open Monday to Friday, from 8am to 5pm, (670) 256-2668.

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CNMI businesses upbeat about full recovery

By BEA CABRERA
beacabrerasaipan@gmail.com
CORRESPONDENT

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic that continues to rage across much of the globe, the CNMI business community is slowly picking up the pieces and trying to fashion semi-normal operations in the face of new challenges. The ones that didn't close are holding up and the ones that temporarily closed are opening one by one—not only to generate income for the CNMI but also to provide food on the table for families of workers and employees.

For a place that has seen its share of devastating typhoons and economic upheavals, the CNMI still finds itself in uncharted territory. "The difference between super typhoons and this pandemic is, with the former, we already know what is going to happen. Since we experienced it a couple of times in our lifetime, there is some kind of certainty. But with the pandemic, you have different developments every day and, when there is uncertainty, people tend to become fearful," said Saipan Chamber of Commerce president Velma Palacios.

With businesses getting



back to their feet and trying to retrofit the business for health and safety reasons, the focus this time, Palacios said, is the safety of both employees and customers.

With the CNMI's Community Vulnerability Level now at "Blue" (one step away from the safest level of "Green"), Palacios said that most businesses are still trying to return

to their routine and working on their loans, whether it is the Paycheck Protection Program or Economic Injury Disaster Loan.

"I am looking forward to

reach 'Level Green,' where businesses can be operational just like pre-COVID-19. ... In order to achieve that, I personally think that strengthening the domestic business

Gov. Ralph Torres joins the Marianas Visitors Authority board at a meeting recently at the Governor's Office on Capital Hill.

scene should be a priority...," she said. "I know there are some businesses that are contemplating whether to open or not and wait for the tourists to come. ... There are still a lot of things to be done and for us to welcome back tourists smoothly and safely, we have to work with the governments where we get our tourists from."

Tourism is the lifeblood of the CNMI and, with no flights and tourists coming in, the government is looking for other ways to sell the Marianas as a tourist destination. With many people itchy to travel after quarantine, many tourist destinations will compete for this market.

At a Marianas Visitors Authority board meeting recently that Gov. Ralph DLG Torres joined briefly, he raised the idea of rebranding the CNMI to attract high-end tourists. "How do we rebrand the Marianas? Where do we go from here? Our vision moving forward [is to] push eco-tourism," he said.

See CNMI on Next Page

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CNMI

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Toward this end, the CNMI has contracted the help of YouTube influencer Robert Arrington, whose channel has 2.31 million fans, to promote Saipan, Tinian, Rota, and the Northern Islands. "He will spend a few months here, promote the Marianas and go to every tourist site to make sure the world will know what we have here. ... This is the best opportunity for us to attract high-end tourists to appreciate what we have here," Torres said.

MVA director Jerry Tan also pushed the idea of destination enhancement, with most of Saipan's tourists being repeaters. "Now is the best time to take care of our tourist sites while there are no tourists around—clean sites and fix broken restrooms and rails on those sites. ... We should... try fix as much as we can so when the tourists finally come back, for first-timers that would be a great but for a repeater, the enhancements would be a pleasant surprise," he said.

"Again, in going after the high-end market, we have to emphasize quality over quantity. ... The opportunity to promote the Northern Islands



BEA CABRERA

"I think that's one of the great things here [is] we follow the guidelines and we take it seriously," said Saipan Chamber of Commerce president Velma Palacios.

will attract tourists who are willing to pay lots of money to go there for an adventure. ... Palau's monthly arrivals sta-

tistics have Europeans and we hope to get that market too. ... Rebranding will be helpful to the three islands and the

Northern Islands," he added.

MVA board director Chris Nelson also raised the suggestion of building outdoor showers at popular beach sites. "That will be a quick win for us and... we are not talking of a lot of money to do that. ... I think beach showers would be good for locals and tourists, where fresh water is available so parents can clean up their kids and tourists can also clean up before they get into their cars," he said.

Hotel Association of the Northern Mariana Islands chair Gloria Cavanagh said the CNMI should make itself ready as far as making it "the" destination to go, "... provided protocols are set" by the Commonwealth Healthcare Corp. and the COVID-19 Task Force, which are being worked on by all partners.

"A big challenge, of course, is the mandatory quarantine for both the CNMI as well as the source market," she added.

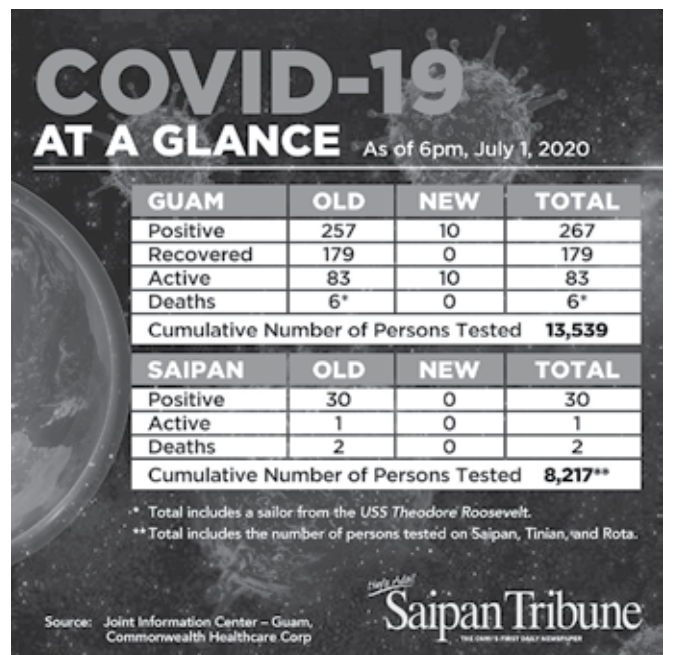
To date, only three hotels are operational on the islands in terms of accommodations: Pacific Island Club Saipan in San Antonio and Kanoa Resort in Susupe are being used as quarantine sites while Hyatt Regency Saipan in Garapan is accepting room reservations only for Federal Emergency Management Agency officers and personnel and several contractors.

'We are fighters and that's the great thing about the community. Everybody still comes together, just like any disaster and now a pandemic. I think that's one of the great things here—we follow the guidelines and we take it seriously.'
— Saipan Chamber of Commerce president **Velma Palacios**

Restaurants are slowly opening for take-out and dine-in services but on limited hours like Hyatt, Fiesta Resort & Spa Saipan, Aqua Resort Saipan, and the soon-to-open Ohas Café at Kensington Hotel Saipan.

Palacios is optimistic, describing the CNMI busi-

ness community as fighters. "We are fighters and that's the great thing about the community. Everybody still comes together, just like any disaster and now a pandemic. I think that's one of the great things here—we follow the guidelines and we take it seriously," she added.



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Within 15-20 minutes, UV-C light fixtures can disinfect an area of 300 square feet with 99% disinfections levels. UV-C bulbs last between 8,000 to 12,000 hours and the only operating cost is power. If you use the bulbs for 1 hour per day, over the life time of the bulbs, this is less than \$.29 per day.

UV-C light can be used in schools, offices, sales counters, lobbies, waiting rooms, hotel rooms, restaurants, cars, buses, ambulances and medical offices.

UV-C fixture above the cashier counter could disinfect the entire area in minutes at end of day or beginning of date. This way, both the employees and customers have added safety and protection against potential infection. No residual chemical buildup on surfaces, no odor or chemical smell, it's high energy sunlight.

UV-C light does not affect electronics, food, paper, plastic and will not cause skin cancer like sunlight (UV-A) with prolonged exposure.

No need to buy costly liquid disinfecting agents or use additional staff time to clean. Published reports point out that hand wiping only disinfects 62% of the surfaces to be cleaned. Reinforce and supplement your normal cleaning routine but add additional assurance with UV-C light.

Please call Bill Giles at 284-7787 or email livewellUV@gmail.com or Paul Zak at 287-4569.





Once again, our resilience and teamwork are tested at these challenging times. However, we have shown in the past how we thrive as one community by stepping up and providing help to those in need. We are very fortunate to live in an island paradise that prides itself for having people with a generous heart. We, at the **Tan Siu Lin Foundation**, commends groups and individuals, both in the public and private sectors, for their kindness, and encourage everyone to work together as we battle this pandemic.

From the management and staff of



Tan Holdings
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**Tan Siu Lin
Foundation**