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**By: Camden Lazenby | [clazenby2@radford.edu](mailto:clazenby2@radford.edu)**

The Tartan spoke with David Horton, the mayor of Radford, Tuesday morning about what he's doing in the face of the growing COVID-19 pandemic.

The interview was conducted before the announcement of the first case of a [Radford University student that has tested positive for COVID-19](#).

**This interview has been lightly edited for clarity.**

**The Tartan:** First of all, what's your reaction to Governor Northam's announcement yesterday.

**David Horton:** I think the governor is making the right choices. I think it's a tough balance. You don't want to be overly restrictive. You don't want to come at this problem too hard, but at the same time, you don't want to come too soft and be behind the curve. So I think he is evaluating daily. I know he is doing what we're doing here at Radford, talking with health officials to find out what is the public safety needs at this moment in time.

Most of our businesses are stepping up, most of our residents are stepping up to be supportive and to try to do things the best way possible. I think he's trying to weigh all that information and determine what the ramifications are so I can say this. You have extremes. There's a wide spectrum ... There's a wide spectrum there are people who say shut everything down. Everything's on lockdown. Nobody goes anywhere but to the grocery store for 10 minutes once a week or something like that. And you have people who are on the far other end of the spectrum that says this is not as big a deal. Let's keep things open; let's keep things going. And the answer is somewhere in between. Because when you shut everything down, you create other public health issues.

Perfect example: Transit systems may have to stop if we're on lockdown. And many of our essential employees who are working for our grocery stores and our drugstores use the transit system to get to work. So you've just created a different problem. There are, I think,

everything is a balance. And right now, the pendulum is at one part of the spectrum. Probably be in another part if things continue to grow. We are in constant contact in the Commonwealth and in New River Valley and in Radford with public health officials to get their best bit of the information that they have and for us to take the appropriate action based on that information.

**TT:** Can you talk to me about how you've been communicating with Radford citizens? You've been really, I don't want to say prolific, but you've been extra communicative to everyone.

**DH:** You know it's one of the things you feel kind of powerless in a situation like this where you don't have a cure, you don't have a treatment, you don't have a magic wand to make this go away. So, I think all of us need to think about what can we do to try to help alleviate the situation a little bit. And one of the things I do have is a platform to be able to share messages to weed through some of the misinformation that's out there and to be able to communicate to hopefully provide some solace, some information that's useful, and some direction for folks. I think that's what we have to do.

Dr. Hemphill's doing a great job of that with the university community. We're trying to do that for the city and the New River Valley and for other people that I have in other communities. You know we're all connected in the world now, and we're really struggling through a lot of things. It won't be long before we have more such patients here in Radford and the New River Valley.

It's been effective, but it's a little overwhelming at times because I give a lot of information, and I try to put information out there and try to find the right balance for that too. I want people to have a source that they can come to for information that they realized is relatively reliable on a daily basis to help them sort through all of this; because it's like drinking from the firehose every day, there's so much thrown at us, so much information, and I think it's really important that we share what we can, that we're truthful, and if they're things we don't know we say we don't know. We're going to find out and then try to help people feel a little more calm.

There are so many many elements to this. There's first and foremost the COVID-19 public health issue, but then there's an economic issue, and with that comes a mental health issue, and anxiety and so many things are affecting the folks that we care about, our neighbors and citizens and friends. So whatever we can do to help, we try to do. It's been effective, but it's a little overwhelming at times because I give a lot of information, and I try to put information out there and try to find the right balance for that too.

**TT:** What's been the reception from the governor's measures over the past week or so from local businesses?

**DH:** Well, I know local businesses are very understanding. They're doing the best they can.

One of the challenges is that local businesses are not just in business to make money. They provide a service whether they're providing you with food or with groceries or with personal supplies or clothing-things you need in your daily life. And so, while they understand the need for this public health situation, I think there's some frustration because they have employees, they have bills they have to pay, and they're trying to navigate through this. I don't think anybody's happy about anything that's happening. Certainly, we would much rather be in a situation where things are more normal where we have businesses operating and people participating and going down that path the right way, but I think everybody is doing the best that he has.

I've not heard anybody just outright complaining that the governor has imposed the things that he has. I think he is also really good job communicating. You know, having daily briefings and multiple messages posted during the day to clarify messaging. That's important right now because we're all in uncharted waters, and we're trying to find a path for everybody to be OK, healthy, and successful. So it's a challenge. Most of our businesses are stepping up, most of our residents are stepping up to be supportive and to try to do things the best way possible.

**TT:** Another thing is a lot of people have talked about the parks, the need to keep them open for people, and some have freaked out about how many people have gone to the parks. What's your stance on that?

**DH:** Well, we're keeping them open for now. I spoke specifically with our public health professionals and public safety professionals about that. Their best advice is for what I posted about yesterday: individual responsibility. This is where folks have to determine if this is a health risk to your child, to their family-maybe they stay home. They also have to monitor what your child and their family members are doing and make a determination. Is that inappropriate? Are they touching their face a lot and touching the slides and all that? Your kids are going to do that. It's hard. So you make that judgment call for yourself.

Nobody's necessarily policing it, but we all have the power to make those choices ourselves. We are cleaning things in our parks. We are limiting access to things like the dog park to 10 people or less, but some of this is going to have to be self-policed. If you have 10 people the dog park and you're going down, you may have to wait through a few minutes to

be able to use it. If you've been in there a little while and you see somebody waiting, you may need to do the right thing and get up and go out. I'll put it this way: it's kind of like when you're riding on a bus, and someone gets on the bus that obviously needs a seat, and you have a seat. What do you do? Nobody's necessarily policing it, but we all have the power to make those choices ourselves.

Be aware, be intentional, and be appropriate.

**TT:** Is that your recommendation for how Radford citizens should be handling themselves right now as a whole?

**DH:** I think so. I mean, I think the thing is I've seen everybody stepping up. People are making sure our kids and families are being fed that rely on our school system to do that. People are making sure that if seniors need assistance, they're getting the assistance they need. If someone's uncomfortable going to get supplies, we're making sure that they have the supplies. So people are stepping up, and I believe it'll happen in another way.

Be aware, be intentional, and be appropriate. Now some folks young and old struggle with going into a self-isolation situation, and I understand that, but it's going to have to happen. And so we do have authorities who are communicating with people to try to help them understand when their behavior is not as appropriate as it could be. So I think most people are going to do it. It doesn't take very many to not do it to really be noticeable, and then it becomes a thing. Social media magnifies everything. It all always feels different, but for the most part, everybody's doing a really good job. And we need to keep doing a good job because again our personal behavior and our personal choices will determine whether this is a manageable smaller situation or a massive situation that gets out of hand like wildfire.

**TT:** That's most of the questions I had for you, but I really appreciate you taking your time. Thank you so much, David.

**DH:** I hope this is helpful. I think the important thing is to help us spread word. We do encourage people to stay home if they can, practice social distancing and good health sanitation: wash your hands, sanitize your public areas, your private space that you're working at, and make a choice. Think about everybody in this community, not just yourself. Think about other people.

Can you help? And sometimes helping is choosing not to do something.

For more updates on COVID-19, follow The Tartan on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).