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SLEEVES UP

Pharmacy staff meeting patients grateful, eager for vaccine

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By HOLLY PATTERSON



Laura Brocklehurst rolls up her sleeve, holds son William's hand and receives a Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine from Ida Menold of Walberg Family Pharmacies Tuesday at Thiel College's Passavant Center.

Last week, Walberg Family Pharmacies owners Stacey and Bretton Walberg announced their plan for a number of clinics to administer nearly 10,000 doses of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine to local communities.

Since then, the Walbergs and staff have seen thousands of sleeves rolled up takers, relieved to get the first shot, eager to move back to some state of normalcy.

Despite ice and snow from the night before, Thiel College's Passavant Center was the site of Tuesday's clinic, another such effort in the company's most recent plan to administer the COVID-19 vaccine.

"I think this clinic is going flawlessly," said Kylee Lewis, Walberg pharmacist and clinical care coordinator, adding that Passavant's perks include a nearby parking lot, plenty of space for people to socially-distance and open enough to handle several dozen people at one time.

"They have helped us out in getting everything salted and plowed for patients," Lewis said of the collaboration with Thiel College. "And the amount of space, we have been able to get everyone inside, out of that weather and through the line relatively quickly."



Patient check in with in-take clerks from Walberg Family Pharmacies Tuesday at Thiel College's Passavant Center before receiving a first dose of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine. Photos by Holly Patterson/R-A

Eight people checked in patients and got them in line, with seven or eight pharmacists and nurses administering the vaccine.

Lewis said they were expecting about 2,000 people to get their first COVID-19 vaccine throughout the day.

"A lot of people are so appreciative to be able to receive the vaccine, to get it into the community and get people vaccinated," she said. "They are just excited for it to be here, to build up their immunity and get on with their normal life again."

There are still some people weighing the pros and cons of the vaccine.

"Everything is risk versus benefit, and I think the risk of the virus far outweighs the risk of the vaccine," Lewis said, citing a rate of 95 percent effectiveness for both the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines. "There is always that variable of the unknown, but I think the unknown of the virus — contracting COVID-19 — you don't know how you are going to react to that; you might end up with mild symptoms like a stuffed up nose, or in the hospital, on a vent or even worse." Side effects of a vaccine, however, could be a sore arm for a day or two, fatigue or a headache that lasts a day or two.



Pharmacist Ida Menold (seated right), of Walberg Family Pharmacies, administers the first dose of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine to William Brocklehurst, 19 (center), during a vaccination clinic at Passavant Center Tuesday, while mom Laura Brocklehurst held his hand. Holly Patterson/R-A

“That, in my opinion, is worth not getting the virus,” Lewis said. “This helps protect your loved ones, protecting your grandparents, protecting your community members.”

Greenville resident Laura Brocklehurst and her son William, 19, each got a vaccine Tuesday morning.

For them, Brocklehurst said it’s important for her and William, who is autistic, to be covered with the vaccine, but also said it was for her family as well that they got the vaccine.

“I was relieved when I heard this was coming,” she said of the clinic. “I am doing it to protect him. Well, to protect us.”

Roberta Leonard, Thiel’s vice-president of college advancement, was happy to see the Passavant Center buzzing with activity.

“Normally, this time of year, we host the symphony, but because of the pandemic, we were not able to,” she said of the collaboration with the Greenville Symphony Orchestra. “But seeing all of these people here, it makes me happy that we are helping this many people.”

Walberg Family Pharmacies continues to request vaccines and will host additional clinics throughout the next several days and weeks as those vaccines are available.