*Back Home by Chris Hardie*

**We move ahead in pandemic world**

Outside a much-needed spring rain soaks the ground. Crabapple trees are blooming, two turkeys are walking along the creek and the recently returned hummingbirds are greedily ingesting sugar water.

It’s a typical mid-May morning on the farm by all appearances, as the vernal cycle of nature strengthens its turn. Crops and gardens are being planted as another growing season begins.

But we question what is typical or normal anymore in our world, where a vicious virus named COVID-19 continues to spread, the toll nearing counting millions infected and hundreds of thousands dead. “Normal” is questionable in a world where we are told to practice safe distancing and hygiene — at the same time that only small portion of the U.S. population has been tested and tstates are relaxing restrictions.

Perhaps someday we’ll look back at this time and label it BC, DC and AC — Before COVID, During COVID and After COVID.

We can remember BC with fondness. People hugged, shook hands and gathered in large numbers to watch concerts, sporting events and high school graduations. We ate in crowded restaurants. The only people wearing masks were health professionals or people with severe immunity issues.

The challenge with DC is the uncertainty. Ready or not, much of society is moving back to attempt BC activities. Will there be a resurgence? Will the eight weeks of isolation be all for naught? Or will we be able to handle pockets of outbreaks on a local level and learn how to deal with it?

Last month, our state Supreme Court declared Wisconsin’s extended safer-at-home order unconstitutional. That decision immediately ended any COVID-19 business regulations unless local authorities imposed rules.

My wife, Sherry, and I operate Brambleberry Winery with an inn and wedding venue. We have had no guests since February and no spring weddings. The winery was ordered to be closed — takeouts only allowed — during Wisconsin’s safer-at-home restrictions. There has been no unemployment benefits, very limited government money, and a lot of worry.

Yet the decision to reopen is complex. Economically it’s a no-brainer. But what about our responsibility to keeping our customers, ourselves and our employees safe? How do we balance the need to make a living versus the need to be extra-vigilant and conscientious about others? Do the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few? Are we the few or are we the many?

Referring to and following business safer-reopening guidelines, we implemented increased hygiene and sanitation practices. We limited capacity to maintain effective physical distancing, and changed procedures to limit contact and require masks.

Some customers may like it. Others won’t. The choice is theirs.

These DC times are filled with uncertainty, unrest and the unknown. Yet we must move ahead with logic, order and knowledge until the vaccine is ubiquitous. There are always risks in life. But there’s a big difference between running blindfolded across a busy highway versus looking both ways and crossing at an intersection.

When the AC days are finally here — and they cannot come soon enough — I hope we can look back, learn from our mistakes and be better prepared the next time. It’s the least we can do for the sake of humanity.

If we don’t, history will judge us as fools for trading lives for livelihood.

*Chris Hardie spent more than 30 years as a reporter, editor and publisher. He was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and won dozens of state and national journalism awards. He is a former president of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association. Contact him at* [*chardie1963@gmail.com*](mailto:chardie1963@gmail.com)*.*

**Photo cutlines:**

061020-agrv-life-hardie-1: The Hardies are encouraging customers to sanitize their hands upon entering Brambleberry Winery.

061020-agrv-life-hardie-2: A cabinet with disinfectants, gloves, masks and disposable cups is a sign of the times.

061020-agrv-life-hardie-3: A flowering crab-apple tree is still a sure sign of May.