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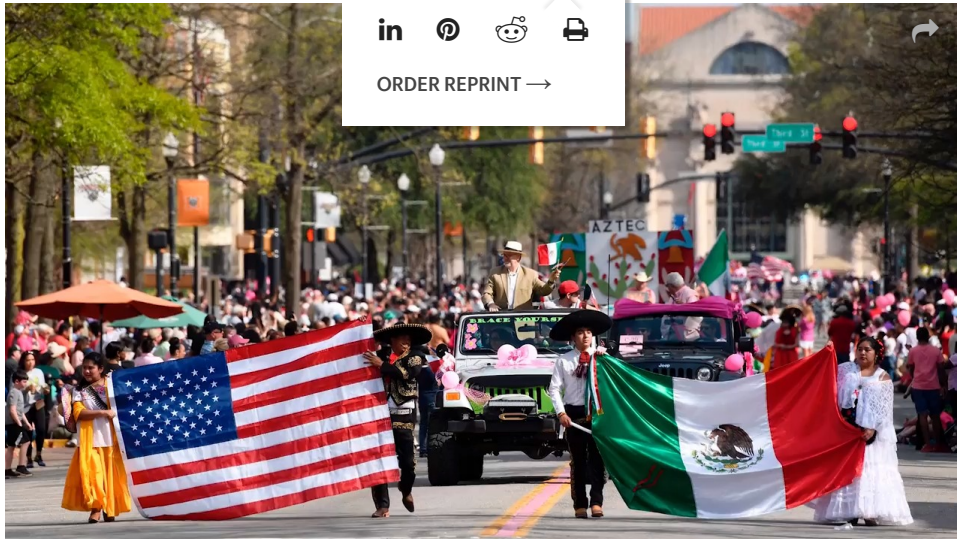
COLUMN: Support our neighbors

BY GARY WHEAT *PRESIDENT/CEO, VISIT MACON*

MARCH 31, 2020 10:51 AM, UPDATED 39 MINUTES AGO



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Macon-Bibb County Convention and Visitors Bureau CEO Gary Wheat says tourism brings in millions of dollars through everything from festivals to conventions and more. BY [JASON VORHEES](#) ✉

Note: The Macon Telegraph and McClatchy News Sites are offering most coverage of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic to all, with no payment required. We want to ensure our readers can make critical decisions for themselves and their families. To continue supporting vital reporting like this, please consider a [digital subscription](#). For more coverage, subscribe to our daily [coronavirus newsletter](#).

“Unprecedented times.” That has been my response when people have asked for my take on the current state of tourism not only in Macon, but across America. In my 20 years in the industry, there have been many tragedies and natural disasters which have affected the tourism industry. Now, we must carry on in the face of another great challenge to our country and community – COVID-19.

Yes, we should all adhere to the [recommendations, restrictions and guidelines](#) that healthcare and government leaders have put in place. The health of residents and visitors is priority one. But it is imperative that we look after one another during these stressful and uncertain times. While social distancing, I would encourage everyone to still give thought to the 3,800 hospitality and small business employees that support the Macon-Bibb workforce.

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These employees depend on people staying in hotels, eating in restaurants and visiting attractions to support their families. These workers are our neighbors, family members, students and friends and they're concerned about being able to pay their bills on time. With isolation and social distancing as the new normal, these businesses and workers are forced into a dire situation.

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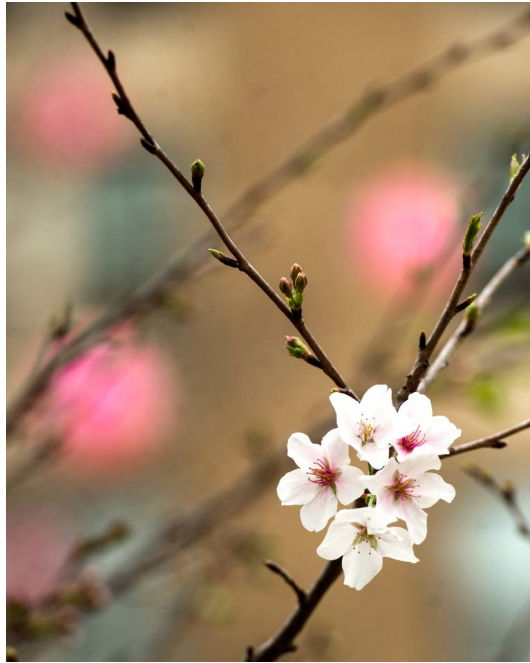
[From curbside service](#) to [virtual Cherry Blossom viewing](#), we must all continue to support those on our hospitality front lines as they find ways to work through these challenging times. We are all working feverishly to find creative ways to keep these vital citizens in the workforce and the tax base working for all of us. We must continue to tell Macon's story so that when our communities emerge from this pandemic, the health of our economy will return in a robust way.

How can you support the local tourism community and continue to follow health and safety guidelines? I would encourage you to help us tell the story. Turn to social media to share information about your favorite restaurant and then utilize the curbside pickup service that many Macon restaurants are providing so you can have a great meal with your family.

Encourage family, friends and business associates to visit Macon once we receive the "all clear," or better yet, the "everyone gather and travel" signal from our healthcare providers. Encourage

Yes, we must protect ourselves and our family's health and well-being during this time, but I encourage everyone to think of the future economic health of our community. Let your favorite restaurant, business, hotel or attraction -- and all of their employees -- know that you are thinking of them as well.

And we're thinking of the visitors, too. We love working with you and serving you. We know this has forced changes to your plans for fun, meetings and business, and we know that is disappointing. We miss you, and we can't wait to welcome you to Macon so you can see in person what we're showing you online. These are certainly unprecedented times. Everyone needs support now, and as we've done before, we will carry on.



A young Yoshino cherry blossom tree begins to bloom in Third Street Park in downtown Macon Friday. Organizers announced that Macon's International Cherry Blossom Festival has been canceled due to concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic. JASON VORHEES JVORHEES@MACON.COM

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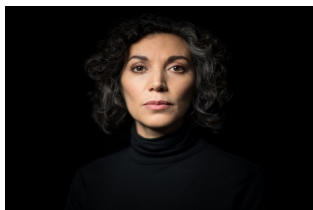
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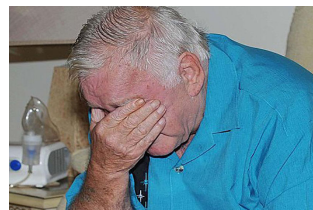
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MARCH 29, 2020 12:30 PM

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31
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MARCH 30, 2020 12:26 PM

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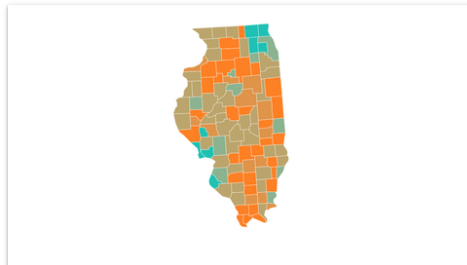
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