

Remember crowded rooms? Adjusting to circumstances beyond our control

BEFORE DRIVING home from work one night last week, I scooped up a couple of green necklaces that had been sitting in my cup holder for several days, a souvenir from a fundraiser.

A bunch of teenagers had been handing them out to people entering the Bob Baines Blarney Breakfast at the Doubletree Hotel on March 12, one of the last times 400 people would be gathering in a room together in Manchester — or anywhere else in the country — and not be branded reckless outlaws.

Right now, we're all hoping we've got the luck of the Irish.

That morning seems like it happened in another lifetime, when shopping malls and sit-down restaurants were open for business, and kids got up every morning and rode buses to schools, when family members weren't separated by the fear of infecting each other and had to cancel that Florida vacation, when seniors didn't have to show up at the grocery store at 5:30 a.m. to score a roll of toilet paper, when year-four college students still had hope there would be Pomp and Circumstance for them this year — not just circumstances beyond their control.

There is absolutely nothing anyone can tell us right now about the impact of COVID-19 that we haven't already seen or contemplated. We've reached the point where running a list of things that are still open makes more sense than an endless catalogue of everything that has closed or has been canceled or rescheduled.

I spent St. Patrick's Day watching one of the most popular bands to ever come out of Boston rehearse for a concert that would have no audience. For the first time in nearly a quarter century, the Dropkick Murphys could not celebrate their patron saint in their hometown, so they gathered in New Hampshire to produce a live concert video streamed on the internet. Missing in action: their bagpipe player, sidelined by coronavirus travel precautions.

The seven musicians on stage at Events United in Derry and the crew working with them to produce the show Tuesday fell just shy of 30, well within the 50-person cap for public gatherings recommended by the Centers for Disease Control.

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About 400 people attended the Bob Baines Blarney Breakfast on March 12, days before such large gatherings were rescheduled as a coronavirus precaution.

MIKE COTE/UNION LEADER



ABOVE: Singer Ken Casey and drummer Matt Kelly of the Dropkick Murphys perform Tuesday at Events United in Derry. The band streamed a live concert later that day. MIKE COTE/UNION LEADER



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Business Editor's Notebook

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The size of the audience the concert would attract was one for the history books: 7 million on Facebook Live and nearly a million on YouTube, and counting.

“I fought the law and the law won,” singers Ken Casey and Al Barr sang, while playing tribute to punk rock icons, the Clash.

It always does, but on this night the band found their way around a ban on big crowds and reached the biggest audience in their history with a single show.

We’re going to see more ingenuity like that in the days ahead. With workers holed up at home, companies

are using web technologies to conduct video meetings. Students from preschool to college are studying online. And biotech companies are working relentlessly to create a vaccine that has billions of people holed up in their homes for at least a matter of weeks if not months. People’s lives are being upended, and thousands of workers will be collecting unemployment, hoping they will have jobs to return to when it’s safe to come out again.

Meanwhile, first responders, hospital staff, grocery store workers, pharmacists, restaurant takeout cooks, government workers, nonprofit and government leaders — everyone still out there faced with some

of the greatest challenges of their careers — try to maintain some semblance of normalcy and provide essential services.

We can all learn to practice social distancing, but can we go the distance? We’re all about to find out.

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