

# The Carmel Pine Cone

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## Carmel Foundation planning July 1 reopening

ONLINE TALKS and curbside lunches will soon make way for in-person classes and dining around tables at The Carmel Foundation, which shut down March 11, 2020, a week before the county went into lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic. CEO Holly Zoller said this week that the nonprofit hopes to reopen for its roughly 3,000 members, all of whom are 55 or older, July 1. More outdoors “We have been doing a little ‘remodeling’ of our outdoor areas, and although they might not be fully completed by the time we are open, I think our members will be excited by all of the expanded outdoor seating areas we are creating,” she said Tuesday, the day many of the state-imposed restrictions were lifted. Offering low-cost lunches for curbside pickup four days a week during the closure has been “highly successful,” Zoller said, but starting in mid-July, she and her staff will test the waters for onsite dining. “The last two weeks of July, we will be adding two seated lunches per week in our dining hall while reducing the curbside meals to two days per week,” she said. “We want to see how many people feel safe enough to come in person, as compared to curbside pick-up.” Most of the foundation’s instructors plan to return to lead classes in various subjects on site, and eventually, the monthly Wednesday lectures will resume, too.

### Masks for now

Whatever happens, she said, the foundation will be as flexible as possible.



PHOTO/KERRY BELSER

Carmel Foundation staff members Susan Sailow and Laurel Smelser get the library ready to start receiving members in person again after more than 15 months of closure.



PHOTO/KERRY BELSER

Alfredo Campo delivers lunch to a Carmel Foundation member Thursday as the nonprofit prepares to resume indoor dining.

“Everything is subject to change, based on the response we get for each program,” she said. Considering the older populations it serves, the foundation hosted vaccine clinics for members several months ago, and Zoller also required all her employees to get vaccinated. All but one opted for the shot instead of finding work elsewhere, she said, since none qualified for a medical or religious exemption. “When you really look at the purpose of doing the man-

datory vaccination policy, it’s for our health and the health of our membership,” she said. “When you have about 3,000 members, you have to do what’s best from your point of view.” The foundation’s board supported the policy as well, Zoller noted. Nonetheless, she plans to require everyone to wear masks, for now, since trying to verify whether members have been vaccinated would be too unwieldy, and the foundation’s buildings have multiple entrances and exits that would be difficult to police. She’s also waiting for guidance from county and state officials on what the rules are, now that many of the previous rules have been rescinded. “It is likely we’re going to be more strict with our rules than other places,” she said, especially since the foundation serves older people who are considered higher risk for debilitating and even deadly Covid symptoms. And while the pandemic has had numerous deep downsides, it’s also brought about some positive change. “We’ve learned how to work more efficiently, so some of our business practices have been more refined, and we’ve learned we can perform well with a smaller staff,” Zoller said. “We got by with a fairly lean budget.” She just hired two new employees and is now fully staffed at 15, three fewer positions than before the pandemic shut the foundation down. “We’ve all learned to work smarter,” she said. Considering the nonprofit is 71 years old, some practices were deeply entrenched and unquestioned. The shutdowns, a leaner budget and the ever-changing rules and restrictions of the last 15 months forced her and her staff “to think outside of the box,” she said.