

Radio host reflects on covering pandemic



May 19, 2020 By Nate Smelle

Bancroft's Moose FM radio broadcaster/reporter Mathew Reisler has been on the front lines covering the COVID-19 pandemic since it first began impacting the people of Ontario. The Bancroft Times recently spoke with Reisler about his experience of COVID-19, and what he has learned from following this public health crisis so closely.

Smelle: Hey Matt! Thanks for taking some time to talk to us about your experience reporting on such a massive crisis. What has it been like for you?
Reisler: It is changing every day so it is hard to really say. I remember it was the National Basketball Association, when they suspended their season, that was like the first domino. Then everyone else started to follow suit suspending seasons, cancelling, closing businesses and all that. I think it was a Thursday or a Friday when I saw that happening, and I remember looking at my phone thinking, oh no what's this going to mean? Up until then, not that people hadn't been taking it seriously, but it hadn't been looked at as a super serious threat until that point. After that everything started falling and falling and falling and I realized that everything I had to do would totally change.
Smelle: So how has the pandemic changed your day-to-day routine?
Reisler: Usually I would get out of work around 5 or 5:30 p.m., now I am working until 6 or 6:30 p.m. and sometimes even 7 p.m. depending on what's going on. My job hasn't changed, I am still doing the same stuff and reporting, it's just that with what I am reporting and doing during the day there is a lot more to do. It is more tiring as there is a lot more on the plate, because it's not just reporting news. Now I have to also make sure when I am on the air I am talking about what people need to hear about. I have to stay on top of things more than ever before. Usually I can post a story on Facebook and then I can leave it alone for the day. Now I have to watch over it and make sure people aren't getting too feisty in the comments. And make sure it is up to date still. In the morning there might be 42 cases in the area, but then by 3 p.m. there might be 46. Everything changes on a minute-to-minute basis pretty much.
Smelle: I can relate. Several time now I have had to virtually rewrite articles I wrote before the paper goes to press on Monday because the situation had changed so much over the weekend. Reporting on the radio and being on all the time everyday must get exhausting.
Reisler: Yes that's the thing. Usually I finish writing all the stories around 2 or 3 p.m. so at that point I can record my show and then go home. But now I always have to check before I go to bed to see if anything has changed, see if anyone has died from COVID-19, and if I need to get that update in the news for Sarah ? It just changes so quickly, and sometimes you are just not ready for it to

change. It can catch you off-guard.**Smelle:** It certainly is a lot more stressful. Dealing with so much death and sickness can be very depressing. How is that affecting you?**Reisler:** It is depressing, but at the same time the way I get through it is by thinking about how it may be depressing for me to report, but I need to report it because people need to know what's going on. I hate it, and I dread the day when someone in Bancroft dies from COVID-19 that I might know. If I have to say "Joe Shmo" that lives next door to me passed away of COVID-19 that's going to be horrible. At the same time, people have to know what's going on because that might affect them in some way. For example, maybe the other day they were talking to their neighbour and they might need to go to the hospital to get checked.**Smelle:** This whole situation is really teaching people about the value of accurate information. And yet we have the President of the United States suggesting that you can cure COVID-19 by injecting disinfectant?**Reisler:** Definitely! Putting the President aside for a moment, if Prime Minister Trudeau says something that he thinks is correct but gets one fact wrong; then he broadcasts that to potentially millions of people. So now there are people going around thinking Lysol cures COVID-19 and that's just not true. That's a bad example of accuracy, obviously. It is tough because you have to make sure you are being absolutely 100 per cent correct. Because if you make one little mistake whether it's the Prime Minister or me on the radio then you have thousands, millions of people that think that's true and that can cause so many problems. He could be wrong as soon as it comes out of his mouth. If he goes on at 11:15 a.m. and he finished writing his speech at 11 a.m., well, by 11:05 a.m. what he was going to say could be wrong. That's how crazy this whole thing is, and how quickly everything changes.**Smelle:** You mentioned your days have been a lot busier, and much more stressful; what are you doing to relax these days?**Reisler:** Well, I am thankful that I have a cat, because if I was living alone I think I would be going incredibly stir-crazy. She is the first thing I see when I get home. When I walk into the stairs I always hear her meowing because she can hear me coming up. I open the door and the first thing I see is her sprawled out on the floor, purring, wanting me to pet her. That's really nice to come home to after a stressful day. When I get home I like to be able to sit, relax and not worry about work. I play video games, watch movies, watch Netflix. It's nice to be able to have at least a couple hours to relax and not worry about COVID-19 numbers, COVID-19 deaths, a cure and all that.**Smelle:** What have you learned from your experience of covering the pandemic so far?**Reisler:** I've realized how many people listen to us. We have the whole town, or at least the vast majority of them listening to us and paying attention to what we are saying, because we are one of only two places to find out what's going on with Bancroft council, Hastings Highlands council, Limerick council, etc. Throughout this I have realized just how many people pay attention to us, and how important what we say is. I have people coming up to me all the time from six feet away of course saying that they were listening the other day and they didn't know this, and they didn't know that; or I heard about that and I didn't know if it was true. Before the pandemic I would get that every so often, but not that much. Now I am getting people coming to me thanking me for keeping them up to date and informed.**Smelle:** People seem to be much more engaged with the news because they are realizing it affects them.**Reisler:** Yes, definitely! I think everybody is guilty of biases. Some people were interested in Bancroft council but not Limerick council. Now it seems like everyone is interested in everything. They want to know exactly what's happening in terms of COVID-19 whether it is in their own backyard or two townships over. They want to know how they are reacting.. and that's totally different.**Smelle:** Are there any other changes in the community you have observed engaging with people, from a distance of course, during the pandemic?**Reisler:** At first I found that people were a lot more nervous about what's going on, because there was a lot of uncertainty when this first started. But over the past couple weeks, even the past month, I have found people are a lot more positive about it. And there is a lot more good news coming out. There are so many businesses trying to go above and beyond to try and offer services they would offer before, while following proper guidelines. On my way to work this morning I was stuck behind a convoy of cars. I couldn't tell where they were or where they were going, but they had balloons and a police escort, so I assume they coordinated with the OPP to go to a birthday party. At the beginning of this pandemic we weren't seeing much of that because people were worried about what they had to do to for themselves. But now it seems like people have got a hold of what they need to do to take care of themselves, and they are reaching out to people that might need their help. They are reaching out to people who might need a hand, so they are offering their support to them.**Smelle:** It does seem to be bringing people together in a different way.**Reisler:** I think it's great because the only way we are going to get through this by caring for each other. If we just think about ourselves we are not going to get very far. As long as we've got each others' back, as long as we are keeping physical distance, I think we are going to get out of this just fine.