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University of Northern Iowa

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College Hill businesses circulate safety pledge

As some College Hill establishments prepared to reopen this week, UNI alumnae Kathryn Sogard moved quickly to communicate a new level of expectations to protect the health of customers and staff.

Sogard, who serves as the executive director of College Hill Partnership (its 11-member voting board and board liaisons from the City of Cedar Falls, UNI, and Grow Cedar Valley work to oversee CHP initiatives), distributed information about the “College Hill Promise,” a pledge all business owners were asked to sign and adopt prior to reopening.

Within 24 hours, the pledge – which outlines the commitment to the ‘Three W’s’ including wearing a mask, watching your distance, and washing your hands – had been signed by more than 50 percent of business owners on College Hill, with more expected to commit by next week.

“We wanted a unified statement from College Hill,” said Sogard. “We agreed as businesses that we will do everything we can to protect our patrons.”

Sogard says that while some College Hill businesses are corporate-owned and therefore returning the signed pledge might take a bit more time, she is also maintaining detailed information on the safety protocols outlined by each establishment – including increased sanitation, floor markings for social distancing, removing tables, contactless payments, and more.

Andrew Morse, UNI assistant to the president for board and governmental relations and a CHP liaison, is one of many UNI employees working closely with the association.

“It’s important that together we continue to mask up, social distance, and wash hands. You may not see the life you save, or the business owner or teacher who your actions impact, but this virus has reminded us of the invisible power of community,” said Morse. “It’s important that every member of the campus and surrounding community does their part.”

Sogard and the CHP board are discussing what type of follow-up system might be appropriate, and how to get businesses to participate in the pledge if they haven’t already.

“We know the efforts UNI students are taking on campus. They’re using those good practices throughout the community, and businesses have also worked hard to adapt to keep people safe,” she said. “The opportunities that exist from having a university in our town are so important – both to the city and to the Cedar Valley. We want to highlight the businesses that are willing to go above and beyond, to do the right thing to protect the community as well as their staff.”
