

OUR DUTY AS COMMUNITY LEADERS

America today is faced with a challenge we have never faced before. Our economy has been devastated at a rate worse than the Great Depression and we are looking at the loss of over 150,000 American lives at the rate of one per minute as of last week. The danger is evident, well documented, and rising across the country! Yet many Americans are still adopting a laissez faire attitude about the serious nature of this threat. How can this be when anyone who has had a family member die or been laid low will vehemently tell you how scary this pandemic really is. The reason appears to be a lack of leadership although we have had notable exceptions who have tried to change public perception and actions. Many states have been forced to take extreme measures such as here in Minnesota where masks are now mandatory and nonessential businesses were closed for a period of time. A perfect example recently is where the Effie Rodeo challenged public health mandates and held the event regardless “under protest” to put over a thousand unmasked people at risk. All ten of the professional rodeos in Minnesota, those sanctioned by the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association, had already shut down last spring. Still this amateur event was held putting faithful rodeo fans and contestants in danger. This feels so unjustified when all others did the right thing. Hopefully it won't be another "Super Spreader" event.

You may be asking, “what does this have to do with auctions?” The challenge is really two-fold: First, our moral responsibility to our fellow Americans and auction enthusiasts. Auctioneers are public figures; we advertise and work in the public eye. You may not have considered yourself as a role model, but you are! As such you have the responsibility as a community leader not to create any situation that would contribute to extending the pandemic. Many of you have responded by curtailing the number of auctions you do or by holding them online. Our company postponed or cancelled over a dozen live auctions aimed at late April through June. But what about the financial costs of such actions?

This brings us to the second point: If we, as a people, cannot shut this pandemic down it will dramatically continue to cause financial loss. We have already seen potential sellers reluctant to book an auction, buyers with less funding to make purchases, and heightened concern among buyers to attend auctions. This has taken a serious monetary bite out of most auction companies in the state. It cannot be overstated that we must work to stop the pandemic before getting back to business as usual. With the approach of autumn and the indoor season, the pandemic will continue to reduce our bottom line. Plus there is the ever-present danger of having auctions locked down by law if the infection rate continues to grow.

At present, the rules that auctions need to follow in Minnesota as I understand them include: Auction companies must adopt and implement a Covid-19 preparedness plan, telework if possible, concessions are not recommended. They also require a six foot distance among bidders and masks for everyone. If indoors, the crowd may only number at 25% of the building's capacity with a maximum of 250 people, while outdoors the maximum is still 250 people present. Fines for disregarding these rules start with a \$1,000 fine and may be much more for the auction company.

These rules are not the only financial considerations we must be aware of. What if an auction company has expended a large amount of advertising on any particular auction and the state stops auctions from being held. Or a financial issue that could have an even more detrimental effect on an auction company would involve lawsuits. If an auction is publicly marketed and held, how much liability does that company have if a Covid case can be traced back to the auction. Remember that some of the worst case scenarios already documented involve millions of dollars in medical expenses. And if the person dies what are the financial repercussions? Promoting any large gatherings opens you up to legal opinion.

In the end it all comes down to the moral behavior of our members. Yes, the financial hardships are real but we need to not lose our moral compass in pursuit of money. Taking actions that extend the pandemic will have much greater social and financial costs in the long run. This isn't about politics; it is about our duty to our fellow citizens, our customers, and our neighbors. It is about our duty as leaders in our communities for a safer world. Social distance, wear your mask, and be safe.

Jolene Jokela Veo
Director, MSAA
218-280-9797
JAuction@wcta.net