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Governors State Faculty, Staff Reflect on COVID Losses

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Governors State Faculty, Staff Reflect on COVID Losses



While the world eagerly awaits the full roll out of the COVID-19 vaccine, members of the Governors State University community are quietly mourning the loss of loved ones to the virus that has claimed more than 399,000 American lives to date.

Both Professor Walter Henne and Jose De La Paz, Associate Director of Benefits and Engagement, recently lost parents to COVID-19, reinforcing to them the importance of taking the virus seriously and practicing safety measures.

Dr. Henne, a Chemistry professor, is also [a registered nurse who helped identify and assess his parents'](#) symptoms during daily FaceTime calls. He said his parents took all the right steps and still contracted the illness.

Though his mother recovered fairly quickly, his father struggled for several weeks before passing on New Year's Eve.

“He was repairing his roof just a few weeks before he was infected and was looking forward to life after the virus once the vaccine was readily available,” Dr. Henne said of his 73-year-old father Walter Henne, Sr. Both Dr. Henne’s father and mother lived in isolation and followed every CDC guideline for safety, he said.

“My parents would have needed to live in a cave to be more careful, and that is the point—without a vaccine—it will be nearly impossible to avoid infection,” Dr. Henne said.

Though he acknowledges the controversy surrounding the COVID vaccine, Dr. Henne encourages people to trust science and remain diligent with safety practices. “One positive person has the potential to ultimately infect tens of thousands of people.”



De La Paz, the university’s Human Resources point of contact for employee COVID leave approval, said losing his own mother to COVID seems ironic.

“I’m the one talking with employees about COVID precautions, and I lose my own mom, who was extremely careful.”

De La Paz said he will always carry fond memories of his vibrant mother.

“At 69 years old, my mom was still the life of the party, and always up for a dirty joke—it’s one of the many things I loved about her. That’s how I want to remember her, not how she was in the hospital hooked up to the ventilator.”

Further, he wants his mother’s passing—at the holidays—to serve as a reminder to others.

“I’d like for her final gift to be a warning to everyone to remain diligent and to be safe. As we wait for the vaccine to make its way to the masses, stay safe and cherish your family—from a distance.”