

STOCKING THE SHELVES

art by CASSIE BEISHEIM

Ladue student works as essential employee at Schnucks amid COVID-19 pandemic

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As the nation faces a world-wide pandemic, many businesses, stores and schools have shut down. However, grocery stores are among the few essential institutions that have remained open, ensuring that many civilians have a fair and safe way to feed themselves and their families.

Unfortunately, this essential need comes at a wavering cost for others. Grocery store employees risk their health and the health of their loved ones by coming into work every day during this pandemic. Sophomore Avinash Kamath is among the few grocery store employees fighting the global pandemic at work.

As a Schnucks employee, Kamath is deemed as an essential worker, meaning that he is required to come into work and disregard the stay-at-home order that has been placed on St. Louis city and county. Kamath started working at the popular grocery store Schnucks at the north

Spoede and Olive location during the week of Ladue's spring break, right on the brink of all of the chaos. He usually works a 17-20 hour week, keeping him busy during this dull quarantine, and unlike some other essential workers, he has not had to work overtime. As an employee, Kamath often witnesses the problem of bulk buying, the purchase of large quantities of a particular product or products that often results in a shortage.

As this problem progresses and is apparent throughout the nation, Schnucks implements policies that attempt to control the ever-present issue.

"[Schnucks] deals with it the best they can," Kamath said, "they restock when they have the sup-

plies, and they impose limits on how many rolls of toilet paper you can buy. They can't really speed up manufacturing for necessities, so they try to prevent overbuying from paranoid customers."

With multiple employees along with countless customers per day, Kamath is exposed to large numbers of people, putting his health and safety at risk. Because of this, Kamath takes many precaution-

ary measures for himself and those around him.

"We have to wear hand sanitizer very frequently, I have decided to wear gloves on my own accord, and also because Schnucks doesn't provide them," Kamath explained. "We have to be very weary about touch-

ing items, mostly fruit and meat, and we also have to wipe down the cashier booths, the doors and the shopping carts all the time."

Although Kamath and the other employees are very careful when going to work, Schnucks takes extraordinary measures to ensure a safe and sanitary working environment as well.

"Schnucks is doing everything possible to keep their employees safe, and that makes me happy," Avinash's mother Radhika said. "I am proud that my son works for such an organization."

Despite Kamath's preventative measures at work, him and his family have to continue practicing careful regimen at home due to his mother being at more of a risk of the virus.

"As a recent cancer survivor, I am completely house-bound. I cook,

clean, work, workout and relax with hobbies like painting and the piano," Radhika said. "Avi and his brother go out for essentials and to get in a run, but they mostly stay away from me. No hugs are allowed and we all follow careful hygiene."

Kamath's parents have expressed obvious concern and worry for their son, but despite the various risks, his parents are proud of what he's doing to help.

"It does worry me, but I decided to let him work, as the stores need the help from young kids," Radhika said. "[Essential workers] are putting themselves out there in these difficult times and that makes the life of folks like me so much easier."

Kamath is aware of his mother's present worry and tries his best to convince her that he is safe and being careful.

"My mom has been going crazy

about it. She texts me if I feel okay [while] working there every two hours," Kamath said. "I understand the worry and concern, but you'd think she'd understand that I feel safe given the amount of times I give her the same response."

During this time of panic, it is understandable that people will often find themselves stressed and worried. However, essential workers are doing all they can to ensure a safe and protected environment for themselves and those around them.

"People are still friends, and everyone is amiable towards the customers and one another. However, some customers are anxious and get upset at us for not doing certain things, like enforcing the six-foot rule," Kamath said. "Most shoppers are still very nice though; it's not as if I'm being bombarded with anger and panic 24/7." ■

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