

Colton Merges [00:00:00] Excellent. All right. And then, I just have a little blurb here. So, today is August 5th, 2021. My name is Colton Merges, and I'm interviewing Michael Trimuar in-person via a camcorder. This interview is being conducted as part of a project organized by the National Humanities Center in conjunction with the University of Washington. Our goal is to collect, preserve and share the stories and experiences of health care workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Again, thank you for letting me interview you. Do you mind telling me a little bit about what you do professionally?

Michael Trimuar [00:00:34] I am a maintenance supervisor for Terry Riley Health Services. So, I handle all of the day to day maintenance, preventive maintenance reports, tenant improvement projects, managed construction projects. Just everything that has to do with anything that maintenance – for any of the buildings or new construction.

Colton Merges [00:00:53] Okay. How long you been doing that?

Michael Trimuar [00:00:54] I've been here for six years.

Colton Merges [00:00:55] Six years? Okay. Yeah, has that been doing well for you?

Michael Trimuar [00:00:59] Yes, I love this job. This has been – this is the job that I should have been in all my life. I just – when I got here, I felt like I was part of this facility, or part of Terry Riley and I really like this job.

Colton Merges [00:01:13] Excellent, okay. And how many different clinics are you – do you work on all of them or just – ?

Michael Trimuar [00:01:16] Yes. So, we're – right now we have 18 buildings. We just purchased our 19th. So, there's going to be a whole bunch of TI [Tenant Improvement] stuff to do on our 19th building. So, they're going to be moving all of our St. Ada victims, counselors, to the new buildings, so they can expand and grow.

Colton Merges [00:01:33] Okay. Yeah. And how has your job changed from before, when – if you look at what you were doing before the pandemic to during the pandemic and even now? What are the biggest changes you've seen?

Michael Trimuar [00:01:44] The biggest changes I've seen is just in how we go about doing our jobs when we get into the clinics, you know what I mean? We're making sure that we have all of our safety protocols in place, when we're working in the clinics. It has expanded my job to make sure that all of our employees have a safe work atmosphere. Also, you know, be it sneeze shields or making sure they have the proper safety equipment and everything's in place for them to be able to do that.

Colton Merges [00:02:10] Have you found that difficult to try to retrofit certain places?

Michael Trimuar [00:02:13] It was when this all first started about – I spent many evenings at home building sneeze shields for all of the clinics, you know, until we got some permanent sneeze shields in place. That was a difficult thing, because just trying to keep everybody safe as they were in their work area, and that was just tough for me. I spent many nights at home building these things. Other than that, I mean, it was just kind of day to day stuff that we had to deal with. Of course, trying to get exterior screening stations up and those kinds of things, and trying to find all the material. Everything kind of seemed like it all disappeared really fast. You know, I mean, trying to find pop ups and stuff like that, Yeah, it was just difficult to get.

Colton Merges [00:03:02] So, you were actually in charge of setting up the pop up tents that were outside for screening all that?

Michael Trimuar [00:03:08] Oh yeah, I did them all. And we actually built – so, I started building permanent stations. So, if you look out here in front of the 16th Street Clinic and it's got that little bus stop structure out front? Yeah, I designed and built that. And we did one over at First Street. We did all the welding and had glazers come in and put glass in them, but we had to build these things. And so, we were – spent many, many hours after hours and before hours trying to get this stuff up and ready for these people so they were able to have a safe and clean place to actually work. It screened people before they came into buildings.

Colton Merges [00:03:41] And did you have to do all this by yourself or did you have help?

Michael Trimuar [00:03:43] I have two other maintenance techs, so, yeah, it was all three of us. It was a combined effort. Plus, you know, we have a lot of good people that help them, who was jumping in and doing what they needed to do when they needed to do it, when I couldn't get everything done. So, it was actually fortunate that we have the kind of people that work for Terry Riley.

Colton Merges [00:04:00] So, you found that it was a very supportive group of people to work with? I mean, it was – everything was up in the air. Things were changing really fast. And you felt like, you know, if you needed help and support, it wasn't just you by yourself trying to – ?

Michael Trimuar [00:04:10] Yeah, no, we had lots of help and support. I mean, even with our CEO [Chief Executive Officer], she was right there on the front lines the whole time and working and helping out as much as she could to try to keep things going and finding the stuff that we needed for safety for this whole thing.

Colton Merges [00:04:25] Sounds like you were pretty busy. Did you find yourself also during the day having to do tasks that you've – that you're not normally supposed to – that you're not normally doing? Did you do screening yourself?

Michael Trimuar [00:04:33] No, no screening myself. It was just trying to keep the stuff that they needed for their screening tents. It was tough through the winter, because we'd lose a tent in the wind and then I had to find – so we'd lose a pop-up tent in the wind, it would get all bent up and you know, one ended up in the creek out

here that I had to jump in the creek to fish out. So, I mean, it just – those kind of things. Then, I had to go find another tent and they were just – it was really getting hard to find them. Even with the rental people around here, they just didn't have any because, you know, all the big – St. Luke's and Saint Alfonso's, they're all doing the same kinds of things, you know what I mean? So, it was kinda hard to find that stuff. And so, that was a difficult thing to do – is just to keep everything going as far as that is.

Colton Merges [00:05:24] Would you say that was the most difficult piece, was trying to find the materials and what you needed when they were asked from the – ?

Michael Trimuar [00:05:31] Yes, and so, I always – if I was always going to go get something, I always went and got two or three at the same time if they had them. You know what I mean? So, I have stuff here and another big thing was the plexiglass was – got very scarce for the sneeze shields and stuff to build. And then, we started going to regular glass ribbons all the way across the front desks. I mean you've probably seen them in the clinics. And so, we decided to go that way, just because that glass was more available than the Plexiglas at that first part of the time. And so, we ended up doing Boise 23rd, 16th Street here, First Street, a lot of the marching clinic got them. And so, that was where we were at without those and we took the temporary ones that I made and distributed them out to all the other clinics that didn't have the permanent glass installed.

Colton Merges [00:06:23] Sounds like a lot of allocation of resources and trying to find the best fit with what you had.

Michael Trimuar [00:06:29] Yeah, you know what I mean? And so, I mean, we just did what we needed to do and, you know, either it was plexiglass a glass to get proper safety between the public and the people that were working behind the desk.

Colton Merges [00:06:40] Do the employees thank you? Did you feel like – that what you were doing was appreciated?

Michael Trimuar [00:06:43] Oh, yeah. They were very appreciative. Yeah. I mean, I wished I could have done it a little bit faster than I did, because there was a lot of people that were just really going, Hey, we need this. We need that, we need that. And I go, I can only do so much at time. So, it did, you know – the time spans to try to get all this stuff done was a three month period when I would have liked to have gotten it done in a one month period. And it just didn't happen that way, just because there was – the availability of material.

Colton Merges [00:07:08] Yeah, well, it sounds – like you said, very busy and continue to be busy, but I mean trying to time crunch to try to get this done as fast as possible. How did that affect you at home?

Michael Trimuar [00:07:18] I'm really good about walking away from here. And when I go home, I leave my job here. So, I don't take that home unless I'm working at home. It didn't affect me very much. My home life stayed the same as far as that's concerned.

Colton Merges [00:07:34] Okay. Yeah. You didn't feel like you were overly stressed or that, you know – ?

Michael Trimuar [00:07:37] No, I mean, it was just another aspect to the job. You know, I'm one of those guys where the more tasks I get, the more stuff I got going on and my mind is going, the happier I get. That's why I always got six or eight things going on all at once at the same time. And that's just – I thrive on that. So, that's not – it actually was a pretty good fit for me when this COVID thing hit. I just went, Okay, let's get it done, you know? Yeah.

Colton Merges [00:08:05] Kind of switching gears here, I just kind of want to get some of your takes on – what shocked you the most when you got to witness COVID hitting, you know, the Napa region or when you first had seen COVID?

Michael Trimuar [00:08:15] I – just in the way they – we had to start shutting down access to the clinics and exterior screening, you know, because that's stopped a lot of patient flow or slowed it down quite a bit. That's what kind of surprised me a lot – the way we had to – because we were, you know, shutting all the access doors, only one entrance into the clinic. And that just kind of surprised me that we had to go that far with everything. But then again, once we started it and I kind of got more adept and more information of what this COVID whole thing was and the way – then I kind of understood it after that, you know what I mean? But right at first, it was like, Okay, we're shutting everything down. On one entrance, we got to have extra screening stations. And yeah, that was really surprising to me.

Colton Merges [00:09:04] Did you have any people talk to you personally, whether that be staff or you hearing from people that were – for instance, maybe they weren't allowed to go into the clinic. Did you witness any of that?

Michael Trimuar [00:09:13] I did at a point, because – when I would be on site or whatever, you know, you'd see a line of people outside and, you know – that was actually when it all kind of hit, it was, you know, the end of February. And so, it was still wintertime and cold and trying to get people that were into the tents or into some place that was warm and that standing in line. That was just the – that was the only thing I really witnessed.

Colton Merges [00:09:39] Yeah. Did you find that difficult or was it more that you accepted it?

Michael Trimuar [00:09:44] Yeah, it was difficult to watch people and I was trying to make it as good as I could for people to be, you know, standing outside or even our employees having to stand outside and screen people as they were coming in. That was the most difficult thing to for me to watch these, you know – would have liked to have gotten everybody off the street and had a place to do it inside. But, you know, I mean, we had to go through and build these screening structures and all this other stuff. And we actually went and purchased sheds – little six by eight sheds for screening, to keep people, at least our employees, inside. You know what I mean? Out of the weather and stuff like that. But yeah.

Colton Merges [00:10:24] Are you in charge of with any of the protocols for keeping things clean? So, for instance, you know, PPE [Personal Protective Equipment] or – ?

Michael Trimuar [00:10:34] I don't – in charge of PPE. We have a person that's in charge for that, but I do manage all of the janitorial or outside contracts for janitorial. And so, there was a whole aspect of – we started getting [inaudible] porters coming through the clinic during the day, doing extra wipe downs of doors and door handles and restrooms. An all the public areas, waiting room furniture being wiped down throughout the day, a couple of times throughout the day, front desk, all that kind of stuff. So, I had to manage that too, to get them to hire on extra people to do that. And that was kind of – that was kind of just a weird thing, because we do have [inaudible] porters to do our pharmacies during the day, because they can't get in at night because they have to have a pharmacist on site. So, we do all of our pharmacy cleaning during the day. So, they had to add on about three or four different people to do those kinds of daily cleaning.

Colton Merges [00:11:28] Yeah. And then, you talked about shortage of supplies just to build exterior, you know, screening tents and sheds. What about for cleaning equipment?

Michael Trimuar [00:11:37] We did have an issue with cleaning for a while. I mean, we were able to get – the hand sanitizers we got from a distillery. We bought, what – I think we bought 25 gallon buckets of stuff that smelt like vodka, but it was hand sanitizer. Those – you know what I mean? And then, our cleaning people had a hard time keeping up with the products they needed to do, wipe down and stuff like that. And then, we had some stuff here that we allowed our janitorial people to take and to use for wipe down stuff, because they just couldn't get enough of it. So, we were fortunate in that way, that we had some on site already and then we – our foresight when this all happened, we started buying what we could, as much as we could. And then, that helped with getting us through that whole thing when it first started.

Colton Merges [00:12:30] So, it really sounds like you were prepared and then, also were able to get through with what was – the supply, the 25 gallons of sanitizer – and so, you were actually able to supply.

Michael Trimuar [00:12:43] And disinfectant and all that stuff, and we were able to get enough of it to get us through it. It started – until we started getting supplies back, was starting to get available, you know, three or four months down the line, you know? Then, you know, you go to the Home Depot or the Lowe's and you walk into their cleaning supplies and there was nothing there for months. And then, that stuff started to trickle back, so, it became easier. But the first couple of months was a little difficult to try to keep supplies on hand.

Colton Merges [00:13:07] Was it difficult to try to distribute that so fast, going through everything so much quicker?

Michael Trimuar [00:13:14] Yeah, so, you know, my – one of my biggest nightmares we had is, when this all started, we started having PPE disappearing and that was a difficult thing. So, we had to go gather it all up, lock it up. You know what I mean? Then, we had to distribute it. So, that was kind of a hard thing to do, because that took me a whole lot of time. I had to go find rooms to be able to lock this stuff up. We had to bring it all centralized, and then we had to have somebody be able to distribute it. And that was what Paige – that's one of the ladies that just popped in here. She handled all the PPE and kind of took it all in thing. And then, she would distribute it out with clients as needed.

Colton Merges [00:13:50] Were you surprised to find that PPE would disappear?

Michael Trimuar [00:13:55] You know, I was, at a point, and then you kind of think about it and you go, People are people, you know what I mean? I just – it's just kind of sad to know that some of the Terry Riley employees would actually do that. And so, you know, and I'm sure that it wasn't just us, I'm sure it was everywhere, you know, throughout the nation. You know, that stuff would disappear. That's just – it happens and it's just sad that that does happen. But when things like this happen, those kind of things happen.

Colton Merges [00:14:24] Did the lock and key method work?

Michael Trimuar [00:14:28] Yes, yes. Once we got everything out of the main storage at every building and took it back into one centralized area, that went away, you know, quite quickly. And so, we just locked everything up, you know? And we still do PPE distributed. You know, it's not just readily left on any of the shelves anymore. So, I think that kind of changed the way we handled the PPE, to where it's not just willy nilly given out or left in the store room as far as shelving is concerned. It's stored there, then taken as needed, so, it's distributed as needed.

Colton Merges [00:15:03] It sounds like a lot of protocols changed quickly.

Michael Trimuar [00:15:05] Yes.

Colton Merges [00:15:06] And it sounds like effectively, would you say that?

Michael Trimuar [00:15:07] Yes.

Colton Merges [00:15:08] Okay. Excellent. Well, also, I wanted to ask what your opinion was on – what you think the biggest long term effect you're going to see from the pandemic?

Michael Trimuar [00:15:18] I think the long term effect from the pandemic is going to be – we are – all of our permanent sneeze shields that we put in, those are going to stay. Kind of safety stuff is probably going to stay and then, not go away. I think a lot of our protocols and the way we handled it, like PPE, cleaning supplies and all that kind of stuff is not just stuck on the shelf anymore and left there. And so, it's, you know, put there as needed and we don't leave months of it at a time of stuff on the shelf for cleaning. And that – I think that's going to probably – those protocols will

probably stay, like I said, mostly the PPE. And I think most of the screening stations, we've already been taking down, so we're not putting up – now we're opening the buildings up and people can come into the buildings. We had to build a drive thru pharmacy near First, because we couldn't let a lot of people in the building. So, that generated the whole thing. I built the drive thru in two months over at First and so, we had a whole exterior add-on to the building for a drive thru for the pharmacy, which actually is something that will stay 100%, because it actually is very effective of keeping flow through the pharmacy, you know what I mean? And a lot of people that have ADA [Americans with Disabilities Act] requirements – they can just go through the drive thru and not have to walk into the building. So, those kinds of things are always going to stay now.

Colton Merges [00:16:49] And it sounds like maybe for the better too?

Michael Trimuar [00:16:51] Yeah, you know, I mean – I think some of these things – when these kind of epidemics or whatever come on, you kind of think about it and then, you kind of think, Hey, these are actually better ways, even when the pandemic is not here. These are better ways to support the community and be able to support the public in coming to our facilities.

Colton Merges [00:17:10] Yeah. Thank you for letting me know that. What about you personally? What did you do – did you change anything for you, other than maybe wearing a mask?

Michael Trimuar [00:17:19] You know, I did. For me, I have some psoriatic arthritis and some psoriasis, so, I'm on a biologic, which, you know, lowers my immune system. So, that really made me concerned being in the clinics. And so, you know, I'm on the front line of all this, even behind the scenes, you know, our guys are kind of behind the scenes, we're not really in the front lines. So, we come in after hours, before hours or, you know, kind of through the buildings when people are not around. So, it made me more aware of wearing my PPE to keep myself safe and making sure my guys had what they needed to do their job safely also.

Colton Merges [00:17:58] Okay. And kind of going along the same line, I heard you saying that you're there, front line. You're just usually not the people that people are talking about. Do you feel like you got the proper recognition for what you did?

Michael Trimuar [00:18:11] Yeah. Our people here, our CEO or COO [Chief Operations Officer] and our CFO [Chief Financial Officer], those guys, they really are adamant about, you know, when you're doing something over and above, that they recognize that. And so, yeah, they always did. I always got thank you's from everybody when stuff got done and they all said they felt a little bit safer at their job, so – you know what I mean? I always got recognition for that – you know, maybe not written, but a lot of verbal from people.

Colton Merges [00:18:40] Yeah. Okay. And then, again along the same lines here is that a lot of people have called health care workers or people that are working in the health care field on site as heroes, because they continued to work during the pandemic. Would you feel comfortable if somebody would call you a hero?

Michael Trimuar [00:18:55] Sure. I mean, I did my job, and I think I went over and above what I needed to do and made sure people were safe for the public, as well as our facility. So, yeah, I mean, I wouldn't not say I'm not a hero, but, you know, I'm not going to tell everybody that I'm a hero, because I work in health care. But yeah, I wouldn't. But yeah, it'd be fine.

Colton Merges [00:19:14] Okay. Is there any hopes or fears as we go into the future when we're dealing with COVID?

Michael Trimuar [00:19:21] Oh, I really don't have any fears about it, because I understand it. So, I make sure that I'm safe when I'm doing my job or my guys or even the people that come into the clinic. I make sure everything's safe for them. So, I really don't have no fears that way. What was the other part of that question?

Colton Merges [00:19:38] If you had any hopes?

Michael Trimuar [00:19:40] I really would hope that people would get the vaccine and we'd be on the other side of that, you know? And when you look at the state of Idaho – I think there's, what, 50% or whatever that – and then there's still another 50% that aren't. But I understand people have all their own decisions. They need to make – or, their own beliefs. But I just really wish that people would get the vaccine and we can get over and beyond this. I mean, I don't think it'll probably ever go away, but at least we can get control of it, I guess.

Colton Merges [00:20:10] You look in the news and you see all this information about the Delta variant coming out, and it seems like the – you know, the infection rates are getting as bad as they were last year. Do you think we're going to, you know, go back to right where we were?

Michael Trimuar [00:20:22] It's a big possibility. If people don't do what they're supposed to or should be doing – I know that we had dropped our mask mandates and we did this whole little, you know, had our ID [Identification] things to say that we had gotten our vaccine and now we're back to, you know, having to wear a mask in the clinic and even through admin. We just got the email the other day that we're supposed to wearing masks when we're out working within the public and in our facilities. So, that's changed back. We didn't – that was just within three weeks, we dropped the mask debate, now we're back to it. So, here we go. You know what I mean? How far are we going to go with this? Are we going to be shutting down clinics again and doing screening again? You know, that's what I think about – is that, where this is going to go?

Colton Merges [00:21:14] Do you think the best option we have to try to fight this is the vaccine?

Michael Trimuar [00:21:18] I do, yeah. I mean, I believe that 100%. I mean, I'm probably kind of a living testament to it, because me being with my low immune system, I got the vaccine. I think I was one of the first people that got the vaccine with Terry Riley. And I believe that helped me being in the clinics and being exposed

to it firsthand that I did not get it. So, I mean, I believe that it's what everybody should be doing.

Colton Merges [00:21:44] Is there anything else that you'd like to talk about that I didn't ask?

Michael Trimuar [00:21:48] You know, not offhand, I mean, really just the – you know, I mean, I don't know. There's not really much to talk about it. I mean, just as things come up, we do what we need to do as a whole team for Terry Riley. And a lot of times they just give me projects to take off with for COVID or to help with people in the clinic. And I just do what I do.

Colton Merges [00:22:16] Well, thank you so much for all that you've done. And yeah, if you have anything else to say, you can.

Michael Trimuar [00:22:22] Nope, we're good. I appreciate your time.

Colton Merges [00:22:23] Thank you so much.