



# **Madison County Holds First Suicide Prevention Awareness Day Event**

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EDWARDSVILLE — County and community leaders came together on Friday to share the message of hope and how there are life-saving services available for all who are considering suicide.

“Suicide is a public crisis,” Madison County Mental Health Board president Herb Clay said.

Clay welcomed everyone to the first Madison County Suicide Prevention Awareness event held in the Madison County Administration Building on World Suicide Prevention Day. He said suicide touches the lives of everyone and it does not care about age, gender, race, orientation, income level, religion or background;

“Suicidal thoughts can affect anyone,” he said.

Clay introduced County Board Chairman Kurt Prenzler, who read a proclamation recognizing September as Suicide Prevention Awareness Month

Coroner Stephen Nonn said every 40 seconds someone take their own life.

“That’s right every 40 seconds,” he said. “It’s a national crisis.”

He said suicide is the No. 1 leading cause of death for those 15 to 29 years of age.

Nonn said individuals who commit suicide are not cowards, but rather people who are in pain or feel like they have no other choice.

Katie Wilson said that five years ago she felt like one of those people. She said she had thoughts of suicide and felt there was nothing else to live for and recognized she needed help.

“I called a friend and asked if he could take me to the hospital,” Wilson said. “He did and he waited there with me. He held my hand the whole time and made sure I was OK.”

Two Collinsville firefighters spoke about the perils that paramedics face while on the job.

“I’ve got 40 years in the fire service and seeing the devastation of dealing with suicide until April 30, 2019,” Collinsville Fire Chief Bailot said.

Bailot said at the time he was living in Ohio and they received a phone call his son didn’t show up in class for two days, he said he reached out to the police chief where his son lived and asked if he could check on him.

He said his doorbell rang and there two deputies sheriffs at his front door.

“I knew from my experience there was only one reason that two deputy sheriffs were at his house,” Bailot said. “Our son Steven took his life. He was just 29.

“Listen to that statistic.”

Bailot said his son, a U.S. Navy veteran, was a University of Missouri graduate and in law school at the time of his death.

“The hardest part is people don’t want to ask me about him,” he said. “The take away today for someone who had lost someone is reach out to them and talk to them.”

Collinsville Lt. Kurt Litteken said he’s spent 21 years in the fire service and the past 14 years in Collinsville and there is help for the first responders who deal with crisis on a daily basis.

“As first responders we are supposed to be super strong and the toughest out there,” Litteken said.

Litteken said no matter if the individual is in full-time, paid-on-call or volunteer first responder death is something people have a hard time excepting.

“As first responders it’s something with have to figure out,” he said. “I’m here to say there are ways to get help.”

Litteken said that firefighters/first responders and law enforcement can reach out to the Illinois Firefighter Peer Support (<https://www.ilffps.org/>) or Illinois Law Enforcement Peer Support (<https://www.illeops.org/>) find peers to talk to get the support they need.

“We experience things we shouldn’t have to experience,” he said. “A lot of first responders have baggage and we don’t share that with anyone.”

Becky Holmes lost her son, a U.S. Marine veteran, to suicide and said a “glitch” in the system is what prevented him from getting the treatment he needed.

“HE was diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder and something in his paperwork prevented him from getting the help he needed,” Holmes said.

Madison County VAC Superintendent Brad Lavite and a U.S. Army veteran said he experienced a PTSD episode like so many veterans, but his outcome was different.

“I’m still here,” Lavite said.



