

Prairie Talks to discuss mental health, suicide

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The next Prairie Talks, "Fighting Stigma: Saving Lives," will explore mental health issues, the related stigma that still exists in our rural communities, and how we can help those who are struggling. Featured speaker will be Beth Huseth, R.N., chair of Community Cares about Suicide Awareness and Prevention in Harvey, N.D., and former North Dakota Suicide Prevention Coalition board member. Huseth will be joined by the Rev. Phil Leer, a founding member of Community Cares and pastor to Harvey families who have lost loved ones to suicide. The event is free and open to the public. It will be held at 2 p.m. Sunday, June 12, at Prairie Village Museum, 102 Highway 2 SE, Rugby.

In the past three years, five Harvey area residents have committed suicide. "The recent suicides add to a long and troubling history of suicide in the greater Harvey area," Leer said. Unofficial statistics indicate an average of one Harvey-area resident has taken his or her own life each year in the past 15 years, a trend that may go back as many as 30 years. "The suicides have been both youth and adults, and most if not all have been male," said Leer, who conducted religious services for three of the most recent suicide victims; two were high school boys who took their lives less than five months apart.

After the second boy's suicide, community leaders came together and agreed, "We have to do something." The initial community meeting became the genesis of the "Community Cares" committee. The committee includes people from all walks of life, religious and secular. Chaired by Huseth, Community Cares has spawned a grief support group, a youth mentoring program, Lighting the Darkness suicide survivor events, mental health speakers for the school, Color Dash 5k walk/runs, and a variety of other events.

Prairie Talks events are free and open to the public. Attendees are invited to tour Prairie Village Museum at no cost on the days of Prairie Talks events. Friends of the Museum cosponsor the Talks and donations are welcomed to help defray expenses.

Since it was founded in 2012, Prairie Talks has hosted eight events, attracting more than 500 people and a range of co-sponsoring organizations from the community. Events have featured journalists, authors, human rights advocates, Native American leaders, and those who use art to explore complex issues of our time.

On Sept. 11 Prairie Talks will mark the centennial of the Pulitzer Prize with "Pulitzer on the Prairie," a talk featuring Mike Jacobs, former editor of the Pulitzer prize-winning Grand Forks Herald, and 1989 Pulitzer finalist Mark Trahant, who is the Charles R. Johnson Endowed Professor of Journalism at the University of North Dakota. Held at Prairie Village Museum, the talk will be moderated by KXMB-TV news director Tom Gerhardt, Bismarck. Visit www.prairietalks.org for more information.