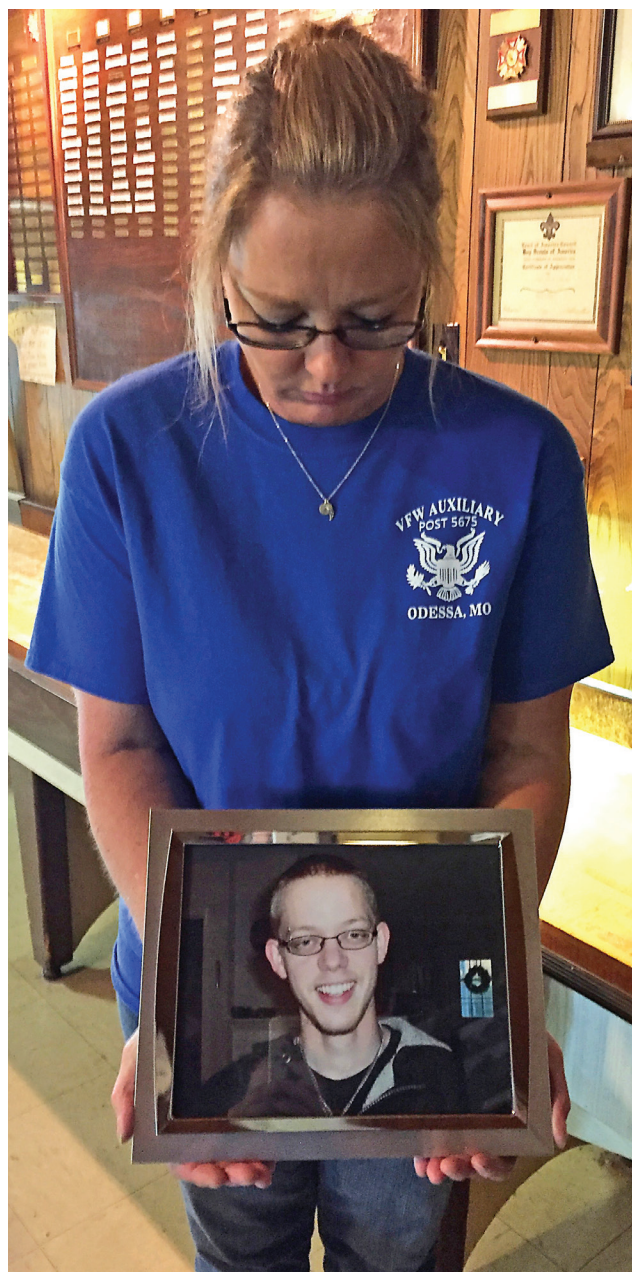


SUICIDE AWARENESS: SAVING LIVES ONE SIGN AT A TIME

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Auxiliary 5675 Life Member Patty Corbett holds a photo of her son, Bo Knowles, who lost his life to suicide in 2013.

Every Tuesday at Odessa Memorial Auxiliary/Post 5675 in Missouri, the dining hall fills up with hungry members, family and friends who can't wait to dig into taco night. It is a feast and fundraiser that, members hope, will save lives.

The money collected these evenings funds a Veterans Crisis Line suicide prevention awareness billboard sponsored by the Auxiliary. The thousands of drivers who pass it each week off I-70 learn chilling figures at a glance; 22 veterans and one active-duty soldier loses his or her life *every day* to suicide. The billboard also includes the Veterans Crisis Line number and text line.

It was exactly what one man needed to see at just the right moment.

"I think there should be one of these in every town," said Life Member and past Auxiliary President Amy Jo Lett. "I had a man call the VFW Post to ask for whoever was in charge of the sign and he said he just wanted me to know that it saved his life. It was like, it's all worth it if it can save even one life. All the great things we do at the Auxiliary and Post, we can't help veterans if they're lost to suicide."

It is a tragedy close to her heart because it claimed the life of her best friend's son. Fellow Life Member Patty Corbett, who Lett has known since grade school, inspired her to focus on suicide prevention awareness. Corbett lost her son, Bo Knowles, to suicide in 2013. He was 21.

Even though it was and always will be painful to think and talk about, Corbett was on board for funding the sign. Getting the word out is something she feels like she's meant to do.



Mother-and-daughter time: Lyla Marshall and Cathy Dandurand enjoy taco night.

“Amy Jo said she wanted to do something involving suicide awareness and asked if it was OK—that we’d be researching it and talking about it a lot,” Corbett said. “It was hard, and it is hard. But it’s when we don’t talk about it that everything goes wrong. It gives me a little more comfort that if talking about this gets awareness out there and lets people know help is available, it’s what I’m supposed to do. I don’t want anyone to ever have to go through that, ever.”

September is National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. The Veterans Affairs (VA) website offers comprehensive resources to support suicide prevention. Visit www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention for information including warning signs; contacts like the Veterans Crisis Line and National Suicide Prevention Lifeline; how to locate a local Suicide Prevention Coordinator; and educational materials.

The Veterans Crisis Line can be reached by phone at 1-800-273-8255 or text – 838255.

In addition, be sure to know the five signs of mental health suffering: personality change, agitation, withdrawal, poor self-care and hopelessness. Learn more about how to address signs of emotional stress at the Campaign to Change Direction, changedirection.org, and its parent organization, Give an Hour, at giveanhour.org.

The Auxiliary billboard costs roughly \$150 a month to lease (in Missouri) with an additional initial cost for the billboard vinyl/artwork. ★ AC

FROM THE VA WEBSITE:

SUICIDE. WHAT ARE THE SIGNS?

- Hopelessness, feeling like there’s no way out
- Anxiety, agitation, sleeplessness, or mood swings
- Feeling like there is no reason to live
- Rage or anger
- Engaging in risky activities without thinking
- Increasing alcohol or drug abuse
- Withdrawing from family and friends

WHAT CAN I DO?

- Start a conversation: Mention the signs that prompted you to talk to them. Stay calm and let the person know you want to help them. Don’t leave the person alone.
- Listen, express concern and reassure the individual: Let the person know you care and that you take the situation seriously. Letting the person know you care will go a long way in establishing a support system.
- Create a safety plan: Ask the person if they have access to anything that could harm them and call for help if you feel the situation is dangerous.
- Get the individual help: Provide resources for the individual. Call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1(800)-273-8255. Or if you feel the situation is severe, take the individual to the closest emergency room or call for help.

Veterans Crisis Line



1-800-273-8255
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