



PHOTO BY SUE ZALOKAR

A man reads the inspirational writings on the side of the Vista Bridge

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*anticipate until it is erected?*

**B.K.:** We have a volunteer patrol scheduled through Aug. 24 right now. The barrier is supposed to be up Aug. 15. To be safe, we extended the patrol schedule a week beyond that, but if it seems that it will be later than that then we will organize more volunteers.

There is still the problem of people jumping — most recently a man jumped on July 16th. We realized that we needed a fix before the barrier. We worked with Oregon Partnership Lines for Life. They do a Safe Talk program, that trains volunteers to connect people with resources, if they need it. We try to have patrols up on the bridge 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

**S.Z.:** *So have your volunteers had an interaction with someone who is contemplating suicide?*

**B.K.:** So far all of us have talked to people who have been distraught. Three of us have been on the bridge and talked to a person who said they had been contemplating it. We have been patrolling for one week.

We are really just there to let people talk and to listen. We have a resource sheet that we offer.

If it's an emergency situation, 911 is contacted.

**S.Z.:** *I wonder if the four suicides and the media attention that the Vista Bridge is getting right now draws people out in a way?*

**B.K.:** Media does not cause suicide. People have been jumping off this bridge since 1925.

I'd love to see the patrols continue onto all of the bridges in Portland, specifically the Fremont Bridge.

**S.Z.:** *There are a number of objections to the barrier, the obstruction of the view from the*

*Vista Bridge is one.*

**B.K.:** Then work with us to build something architecturally appropriate. We love the bridge as much as anybody else, but we need to have it so that it's safe. There are a lot of really lonely people that feel isolated and alone. To have that human contact, can be life changing.

**S.Z.:** *Another criticism is that people will find another way to end their lives.*

**B.K.:** They might. They might also go up there and see the barrier and think about it. But something that is historic and has been listed as one of the top places in North America to commit suicide, will no longer be available.

Typically, they say that if a person goes somewhere to kill themselves and there is something there to stop them, 93 percent will never go through with it. That's incredible.

**S.Z.:** *Another big objection on the project is that the money needs to be invested in mental health services.*

**B.K.:** Take those 17 people who have died since 2004, then add all of those lives of the people who witness or are affected by the suicide and the emergency services, and Tri Met stops and the train stops and think how much that impacts the whole city. Think about how much that costs. Is that \$236,000 really that much?

**S.Z.:** *Jumping off the Vista Bridge affects so many people, not just the friends and family.*

**B.K.:** When you think about the impact, a person jumps. The MAX train stops, the driver and all of the people on the train see the body and are traumatized. Then all of the pedestrians and cars that come by, even if the drivers of those cars don't actually see the body, they are all traumatized. And the people who are living under bridges, what about them? ... When I'm here late at night,

I see many people looking for shelter. There are often people who sleep in the veranda of our building. ... People don't think about that.

People who witness that are impacted. They hold it inside. And maybe they have a drug or alcohol problem.

**S.Z.:** *Or mental health issues of their own.*

**B.K.:** Absolutely. Everybody here has been affected. One of the business owners down the street, and people who have worked for him, have witnessed actual jumpers.

Think about that. Some people who witness a suicide suffer from post traumatic stress syndrome. One person was so traumatized that he couldn't work. He just shut down.

Many family members and friends come here, too. They want to know, "Where did they land?" They all have their processes and how they deal with it. It is really heavy.

**S.Z.:** *We're talking about millions of dollars to build a permanent architecturally appropriate barrier.*

**B.K.:** We've heard \$2.5 - \$3 million. We can think of a million reasons to not have this temporary barrier. If you don't like it, then work as a group to get this moving so that we can get something architecturally appropriate in place. Don't be a person not doing anything, not talking about it. Get up. Stand up and do something. We don't have to be adversarial. We can be friends. We can be a community working together. That's what Portland is about. Stand up, speak out and do something. Talking with other people, it saves lives.

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*Thank you to everyone who participated in our 2013 Online Auction! You keep the presses rolling!*