

# SUICIDE,

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In the wake of the incident at her office, Lott, an optician, searched out a support group for grieving parents, but it was a poor fit. The parents who gathered at the meeting had experienced miscarriages or lost a child to cancer, her son, at least in part, had made a choice. And there were no local support groups for suicide survivors at that time.

"A few months after that I heard about the Out of the Darkness Walk in Portland. My daughter and I signed up, raised a little bit of money and headed to Portland," Lott said.

It proved to be a life-changing trip.

"When something like this happens, you are certain you are the only person in the world who knows what it feels like and to see 1,000 other people who have gone through it ... it was overwhelming and emotional," Lott said.

One ritual she discovered at the Portland walk will be recreated at the Salem Out of the Darkness Walk, an honor bead ceremony. Attendees will be given beads in honor of those they know who died by their own hand and they will be asked to hold them up all at once during the day's proceedings.

"That was the moment at the Portland walk that I knew I was not alone. It's the most sobering, beautiful thing I've seen in my life," Lott said.

While she had trouble finding a reason in John's suicide, Lott was determined to make something good come out of it, and she found it in the Out of the Darkness gathering.

She attended the Portland walk again in 2014 and brought along \$7,000 in donations for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP). In 2015, she raised \$12,000 out of Portland's \$90,000 total.

That's when AFSP Oregon Area Director Ryan Price, also a Keizer resident, asked her to lead up an effort to bring a Darkness Walk to the Cherry City.

## A state and local problem

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for those ages 10 to 34, and it's the eighth leading cause of death in Oregon for all age groups according to statistics from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.

On average, one person in Oregon dies by suicide every 11 hours. The suicide rate in the Beaver State is nearly 1.5 times the national average. The 742 Oregon deaths by suicide in 2014 represent 14,281 years of potential life lost based on an average lifespan of 65 years.

To paint a clearer picture of the issue on the local level, we asked the Keizer Police Department to provide us with statistics related to suicide investigations in the city.

Since 2004, KPD has investigated 32 sui-

cides and another 30 attempts.

Of the 32 suicide deaths, the youngest was 16 years old, the oldest 86 years old, both were females. Twenty-three of the victims were male. Firearms were used in 19 of the deaths, seven were the result of asphyxiation. The worst year was 2009 when seven suicide deaths were investigated.

Of the 30 attempts, 17 were by individuals under the age of 34. Overdose was the most common method in the attempts.

"I'm sure the numbers only represent a fraction of the individuals we come into contact with who are in crisis contemplating doing harm to themselves. Many of those individuals voluntarily receive a ride from us down to the hospital to receive services," said KPD Deputy Chief Jeff Kuhns.

## Get involved: Volunteer or walk in Salem event

The first ever Salem Out of the Darkness Walk is slated Saturday, Oct. 8, at Salem's Riverfront Park.

With more than a month to go, the walk's organizer, Shawn Lott of Keizer, has raised more than \$40,000 and more than 1,000 participants have already registered.

The walk begins at 10 a.m., check-in and registration begins at 8:30 a.m. Registration can also be complet-

ed online at [www.afsp.org/SalemOR](http://www.afsp.org/SalemOR). Pets and strollers are welcome. There is no fee to participate.

There are numerous ways to get involved without actually walking. Sponsorship opportunities are still available and volunteers are needed for the day of the event; participants are welcome to bring signs showing their support. A remembrance tent will also be established

on-site for those willing to contribute non-returnable photos.

The event has already grown beyond Lott's wildest hopes. She is also looking for volunteers to help organize the day's activities and assistance with set-up and tear-down before and after the walk.

For more information, contact Lott at [shawnie8366@yahoo.com](mailto:shawnie8366@yahoo.com).

When Price asked Lott what she wanted fundraising goal to be, he suggested \$25,000. She countered with \$50,000.

"He asked if I thought that was possible. I told him I said it and it's going to happen," Lott said. With more than a month to go, she's already collected more than \$40,000 and more than 1,000 participants have already signed up to walk. Between 25 and 50 people are contacting her each week to find out how to get involved.

The money raised supports efforts of the AFSP including advocacy, research, organizing Survivor Days for those suffering in the wake of suicide and for implementation of the More Than Sad curriculum, a program that instructs teens,

parents and teachers how to be smart about mental health.

Lott is hoping to break AFSP fundraising records with the Salem Out of the Darkness Walk, but she has constant reminders of the real service being provided.

One of Lott's recent calls was from an individual struggling against their own suicidal thoughts. The October event is giving them one more reason to hang on.

"It's about bringing people together who have felt like they can't talk about this, and not just the survivors, the ones who are going through it now. There are 1,000 people out there who know about it already and want to be part of it, but how many others don't

even know yet? I don't want it to pass them by, and I want everyone to get something out of it," she said.

It would be easy to pretend that Lott's newfound purpose was the cliched reason for her son's suicide. Make no mistake, the pain is still quite real. Tears still well up as she talks about John and all the tough lessons she's learned between his suicide and now, but those tears are accompanied by the intense and overwhelming moments when she's making a difference for others who suffer through similar struggles.

It's why she "wakes up every day feeling like I've won the lottery" and her efforts are the most touching tribute one can imagine for a lost son.

## Peach ride Sept. 11

Salem Bicycle Club's Peach of a Century Bicycle Ride is getting closer. The event takes place on Sunday, Sept. 11.

The pre-registration fee is \$30 with an option to buy a sandwich for \$7.50 and a long sleeve Sport-Tek T-shirt for \$20. Day-of-ride registration requires a fee of \$45. Register online at [www.salembicycleclub.org](http://www.salembicycleclub.org).

Packet pick-up and day-of-ride registration is located

at Chemeketa Community College, 4000 Lancaster Drive N.E., Salem. Packet pick-up and day-of-ride registration is from 7:30 a.m. to 9 a.m.

There are two different routes to choose from. One of them is 100 miles, which goes through Jefferson, Stayton, Sublimity, and Silverton. The other is 66 or 76 miles through Jefferson, Stayton, and Aumsville. Be ready to enjoy a piece of peach pie at the end.

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