

Suicide prevention efforts grow

By **Emily Mentzer**
The Itemizer-Observer

MONMOUTH — About 50 people from different service organizations sat around the table on Sept. 14, a group dedicated to cutting through red tape to get services to those in need as quickly as possible.

A man doesn't have his birth certificate, and needs it to get his life back on track. He doesn't have the \$50 required to purchase a copy. Can anyone help?

In just a few minutes, the problem is solved.

It's the Monmouth-Independence Service Integration Team, organized through the Polk County Health Department.

Teams similar to this meet monthly throughout Polk County, a melding of minds and services, annihilating the government service silo model.

At this meeting, Doug Gouge presented on the Mid-Valley Suicide Prevention Coalition, a relatively new resource to the county — less than a year old.

The coalition was formed to address suicide and depression, the eighth leading cause of death overall in Oregon, and the second leading cause of death for those aged 10 to 34.

Gouge said the increase of kids in middle school and high school considering suicide is what sparked the need for more prevention efforts.

He started with student surveys, paying close attention to three questions about depression and suicide.

"The second question is, 'did you ever seriously consider attempting suicide,'" Gouge said. "We saw a rise over the 2011-12 and 2013-14 school years."

Eighth-graders reported a jump in answering 'yes' to this question: 10 percent in 2011-12, up to 17.5 percent in 2013-14, Gouge said.

When it came to the question about actually attempting suicide, that's where the numbers got really concerning, he said.

"It was at 5 percent in 2011-12," Gouge said. "It was 10.5 percent of 11th-graders in 2013-14. We don't know what that means in their mind, but that was concerning."

Efforts to increase awareness and prevention have spread through training sessions — including at Central High School, where students in the leadership class learned QPR training: question, persuade, and refer.

"We feel like we can train anyone 13 years or older in QPR," Gouge said.

The QPR training is free and takes about an hour or

two, Gouge said.

"We trained 16 facilitators in Polk County. Four school counselors in this room right now are trained as QPR to target staff and students," he said.

Another suicide prevention training, ASIST, is more expensive and time-consuming — a two-day seminar that costs \$70.

The coalition has also done community outreach, from a high-school video contest to a website and a presence on social media with the hashtag #OK2ASK.

The next QPR training is Oct. 12 from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Henry Hill Education Support Center.

For more information on suicide and suicide prevention: mvsuicideprevention.org.

For more information about the service integration teams: www.co.polk.or.us/fco.

Wagner funding options discussed

By **Jolene Guzman**
The Itemizer-Observer

FALLS CITY — The city and school district in Falls City are investigating the pros and cons of options to keep the Wagner Community Library open.

During a joint meeting Sept. 19, the Falls City City Council and Falls City School Board discussed the possibility of forming a library district or seeking a local option levy. Both would require voter approval.

A district would ask voters to approve a permanent property tax rate that would support library operations. A local option levy asks voters for a temporary property tax increase and would have to be renewed.

Falls City Schools Superintendent Jack Thompson said he favored the permanent solution a district provides over a local option levy.

"My fear with a local option is that a local option has to be renewed. I think my thought process would be is this should be a permanent district," Thompson said.

Bob Young, a member of

the school board, also said a district is the best solution.

"I think that would be the way to permanently fund it. Where you are not always asking the school district or the city to help pass another levy, bond, whatever you call it, to help keep the thing afloat," he said.

Falls City Mayor Terry Ungricht said forming a district would require creating a governing board.

"Which is all doable, but then they become another layer of government," he said.

Library Director Andy Rommel said he spoke with Polk County Assessor Doug Schmidt about funding options. Schmidt would be willing to meet with the board and council later this fall to explain options, he said.

Jami Kidd, the school board chairwoman, said nothing will be decided about which direction to go until after the meeting with Schmidt.

"Right now we are hoping to look at as many options as we have available and become educated about what those would look like down the road," she said.

Dallas Fire plans going away for chaplain

Itemizer-Observer staff report

DALLAS — Dallas Fire & EMS firefighter and chaplain Dave Pederson will be stepping down after 29 years of service to the department.

Fire & EMS is hosting a

going away party of Pederson on Tuesday at the Dallas Fire Station, 915 SE Shelton St., at 6:30 p.m. Pederson is moving to Colorado to be closer to his family and grandkids.

During his tenure as chaplain, Pederson also has worked with law enforcement during times of need and served the community on the Dallas High School Booster Club. Pederson is

the pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, which will hold a separate going away celebration for its congregation.

All are invited to attend. For more information: 503-831-3533.

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