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## LET'S TALK

### Suicide prevention is on forefront of fight against mental health stigma

By Carter Jones  
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After what's being called a "run of suicides" in the region, mental health practitioners are stepping up to fight the stigma against mental illness.

Over the last year, Perham Health's strategic group, made up of community members, has been bringing general mental health awareness to the community. These efforts are culminating at Perham High School on May 9th at an event entitled "Breaking Barriers." The free event will feature keynote speaker Chris Caulkins, president of the Strub Caulkins Center for Suicide Research.

**Tapping into his pain**  
Caulkins lost his wife, brother and ten colleagues to suicide, and has since devoted his life to suicide research. Caulkins says suicide is highly treatable, and the general public fails to grasp the problem's magnitude. He is cautious to call it an epidemic, but says it's a serious public health problem we need to do something about. "It takes the death of someone we care about to really wake up," he said. "I wouldn't wish what happened to me on anybody."

Caulkins points to the opioid epidemic as an example of how aggressively physical pain is treated, but intense psychological pain goes unnoticed.

"People are surprised to hear mental health professionals don't know a lot about suicide," he said. "They know about the mental health piece, but the suicide piece is scary. They feel it's their fault when a patient commits suicide."

Maggie Fresonke, population health coordinator at Perham Health, said the issue of suicide is finally coming to the forefront.

"We need to wake up and do something about it," she said. "It's happening in the background, people don't realize it's happening, unless it's personally happening to them."

**A perfect storm**  
Caulkins said suicide is multifaceted and rarely triggered by one event.

Using the author Iris Bolton's analogy, Caulkins thinks about it like an empty glass. For every adverse childhood event, lost job or breakup, the glass adds another drop.

"Pretty soon that glass is filled all the way to the top," he said. "When that overflows, everyone blames

that last thing." Because of this, Caulkins tells survivors in the peer support group he runs not to feel guilty.

"People die because of a psychological ache, which is an unbearable pain they want to stop," he said. "They have a desire to die, they don't really want to die, they want to make the pain stop."

Caulkins uses another analogy to get this point across to his audiences: Imagine you can't die no matter what, you're going to feel all the pain and you're never going to believe it's going to stop. Now you're going to get hit in the head with a hammer over and over.

"If that experiment were real, everybody in that room would kill themselves," he said. "Why? To make the pain stop. Are you thinking about your mother or father? You can't."

Caulkins uses this example to explain that the biggest mistake we make is comparing a suicidal mind with a non-suicidal mind.

"You can't fathom it. You can't apply it rationally," he said. "People want to get in that person's head, they had money and a family. Boom the hammer hits."

Caulkins pointed out the lopsided attention by saying 47,000 people died by suicide in 2017, while there was 42,000 breast cancer deaths in the same year.

"Everyone feels they're alone," he said. "There's a crazy number of survivors, but we don't talk about it, we think we're the only ones."

**Social Connection**  
The suicide rate in the U.S. has been climbing for decades. Caulkins attributes this rise to a lack of social connection.

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### 1 IN 3000

## Jessica Masloski puts Perham to work

By Carter Jones  
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*I am a city boy, born and raised in the suburbs of Minneapolis. My entire world changed when I took a job at the Perham Focus as the newspaper's main reporter in December. Now, I am here, in a town of just over 3,000 people, learning what small town living is all about. Perham started surprising me right from the start, and I quickly learned that I don't want to just report what's happening in Perham, I want to report on the people who make this town tick in the most inconspicuous of ways. Some people have a way of always attracting the spotlight, but my 'focus' will be on those who quietly go about their day making this community a better place to live. And since this is my new journey, too, and my 'city' ties are fresh, I wanted to document the adventure of discovering what this 'Perham pride' thing is all about. Everybody*

in Perham has a story, unique in their own way... 1 in 3,000.

### Meeting Jessica

Did you know Perham has a staffing shortage? "There are more jobs than people," is something I've heard over and over since I arrived in Perham.

Staffing Specialist Jessica Masloski is on the front line of Perham's job market, acting as a matchmaker to find the right person for the right job.

Before she started at PeopleReady, Masloski managed a bar and waited tables for years. When her kids started to grow up, she knew it was time to move on from shifts that spanned into the early morning.

Six years later, she utilizes her experience as a bartender to better understand people from different walks of life.

"Not everybody is a welding class person, and not everybody is a general laborer, so being able to handle them differently definitely has helped," she said.

Masloski calls it a "daily struggle" to make people accountable and get them to work, but says it's extremely

enjoyable to find someone who matches up and can grow with the company.

The soft-spoken Masloski describes herself as "kind of the mom," when teaching people the basics of getting, and maintaining a job.

"It's your 18-year-olds, it's your 50-year-old, and more," she said of the diverse range of clients.

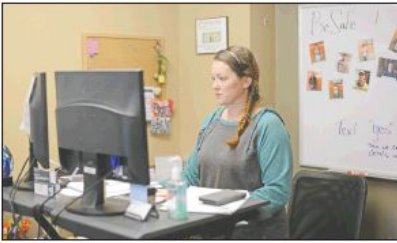
Masloski often has to start from square one, telling a prospective employee how to report on time, do a good job, represent themselves well and also how to make themselves proud.

Although it sounds frustrating, Masloski said the best part of her job is following people as they grow and continue to succeed.

"It is really awesome seeing people who I placed four years ago still at their job and in a supervisory role," she said.

Masloski still bartends part-time, but is happy to not "do that and only that."

When she's not working, Masloski likes to play softball and "chase the kids around all their sports."



Top: Jessica and I take a selfie at People Ready. Bottom: Staffing Specialist Jessica Masloski is on the front line of Perham's job market, acting as a matchmaker to find the right person for the right job. Photos by Carter Jones, FOCUS

## Perham parts with its postmaster

### Vail-Rimer 'delivers' her resignation letter and is set to retire

By Carter Jones  
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When Tammy Vail-Rimer started her career as a mail carrier in Fridley, Minn., she had no idea it would end as the postmaster in Perham.

Now after 25 years, Vail-Rimer is stepping down as postmaster at the end of May. Vail-Rimer's father encouraged her to take the civil service exam with him after he was laid off.

"I was bartending at the time, and he didn't think that was a good profession for me to be in," she says, laughing.

After starting as a city carrier on a "billy goat route" that took her up and down hills, Vail-Rimer was asked by her

supervisor if she would be interested in getting into management. After initially hesitating because she loved carrying so much, Vail-Rimer accepted the challenge and rose up the ladder. Over the years, she's served as a branch manager in Columbia Heights, was on a route inspection team and even served on an Amazon parcel team that flew to Seattle to see how the whole system worked before the online retailer first came to Minneapolis.

"It's been a great job. The lord was looking out for me, I guess," she said. "This kept me out of trouble."

Vail-Rimer made the leap from urban to rural life after her husband was

offered a management position at the Fargo Post Office, and they transitioned to their lake home in Dent.

After years of management, Vail-Rimer still absolutely misses being a mail carrier.

"I loved to be out in the elements, you're your own boss out there," she said. "You get to meet lots of people, some of those customers kind of become your family."

Vail-Rimer said she takes pride in working for such a trusted entity. "These people really rely on us," she said. "It's a good feeling that you're doing something for the good."

Vail-Rimer said it's going to be hard to adjust

to retirement, but is looking forward to golfing and fishing again.

"I don't recall a summer I've ever had off, even before I came to the post office," she said.

"I'm so used to getting up at 4 or 5 in the morning to get ready for work. I don't know what sleeping in is."

Don't expect Vail-Rimer's retirement to last too long, though. She's already planning on finding a part-time job in the fall.

"I'm not one of those people that can not work," she said.

In her resignation letter, Vail-Rimer says she's enjoyed her time here and has loved getting to know the people, businesses,

and the community.

"Small town living was quite a feat for me after living in the big city all my life, but I have adjusted now that I know the area pretty well, and I

kind of like this small town living! It is a bitter-sweet moment for me as I retire, but am SO looking forward to entering a new chapter in my life," the area pretty well, and I



Perham's postmaster Tammy Vail-Rimer is retiring after 25 years on the job.