

IOWA POLICE JOURNAL



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BOARD SPOTLIGHT

By David McFarland, Second Vice President

Greetings from Waterloo, I hope all is well with everyone and their families. In this article I'm going to discuss a topic most people don't want to talk about, but it's something we *must* talk about: *police suicides*.

After 23 years of law enforcement, I can't remember how many suicide calls I have responded to or investigated, and honestly I don't want to. But on September 19, 2014, my perception of suicide was changed forever.

On that day, I was driving back from my vacation in Northern Wisconsin when my cell phone rang. It was my department telling me that my friend and co-worker of 23 years had taken his own life. At first I thought I had misunderstood what they said so I asked again. Unfortunately, they repeated the same thing. Monty had killed himself.

When we got to the next town, I had to pull over so I could get out of the car to walk around. My mind was spinning. I was in shock and disbelief. Monty was a rock; he was the guy you went to if you had a problem. He was the guy who could watch a video or read a book on how to do anything and then do it like he had done it for years. He did so much for our department and had a positive influence on so many officers. I don't know if I have ever known a guy as smart, kind or well-liked. To this day, I still find myself wondering what Monty would do or wishing I could get his opinion.

I know several people at my department, including myself, have asked themselves what they could have done to help prevent this from happening. Honestly, I don't know if there was anything they or I could have done to prevent this. We can't go back in time to change what happened, but we can forever remember the great guy he was and all the great things he did. We must also make sure we are there for his wife, his kids, our co-workers, our families and friends, and most importantly ourselves.

Tragically, before and since Monty's death, several other law enforcement officers in Iowa and across the nation have also lost their battles to suicide. We are losing more officers each year to suicide than any other single cause (gun fire, traffic accidents, ambushes, etc.). This is unacceptable. Unfortunately, at least for the foreseeable future, police suicides are not going away. Not talking about it will not make it go away. We must face this fight head on and start talking about police suicides.

What have you or your department done to help with your mental health? We get training for firearms, TASERS, interviewing and interrogation, law updates and body cameras, but what about suicide prevention and mental health? We must break the stigma that discourages officers from seeking help out of fear of the negative consequences. [The Badge of Life](#) website says: "It is time to de-stigmatize mental health and wellbeing in law enforcement. Wanting to reduce suicides is one thing — accomplishing it is another. It can only happen when mental health becomes a priority and all ranks accept the means as necessary to accomplishing the end."

We have to make sure we know the warning signs to look for and what to do to get help for ourselves or our fellow officers. Most officers get into law enforcement because they have a strong desire to help others, but we must first make a commitment to take care of our own mental health so we can continue to help others. Do you or do your officers know how and/or where to go for help? Does your department have an Employee Assistance Program (EAP)? Do the officers know how to access this program? Do you have a peer support program?

Here are just a couple resources to get you started.

- **Badge of Life** — BadgeOfLife.com
- **National Police Suicide Foundation** — PSF.org
- **Serve and Protect** — ServeProtect.org
- **Get Help 24/7 Hotline** — 615-373-8000 (Calls are answered by active or retired first responders.)
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** — 1-800-273-8255
- [Article](#) written by Katherine Deal, MPH, National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention

The current climate and times of law enforcement have only added to the stress and trauma of being an officer, creating an even greater need for making mental health wellness and suicide prevention training a priority. Please don't wait until it's too late.