

Missouri Auxiliary Saves Lives with Billboard

VFW Auxiliary 5675 in Odessa, Mo., has sponsored a billboard for the past year that touts veteran suicide statistics and contact information for VA's Veterans Crisis Line. That billboard has saved one life already

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"It was just so overwhelming that this crazy idea I had actually worked," said Amy Jo Lett, past Auxiliary 5675 president and current District 6 Auxiliary president.

A man had called the Post asking for the person "in charge" of the sign.

"They told him it was me, and my number is all over Facebook and all over flyers regarding taco night," Lett said. "And he called me. I never even asked his name... I just cried, and he cried."

Lett said the Auxiliary members "need to know that there's someone that these veterans in crisis can call."

"If I don't have veterans to help, then I can't help them when they're gone," Lett said. "And there's a horrible, horrible need for help with our veterans of all ages."

Lett said she thinks "outside the box" and, as the Auxiliary's hospital chairman, asked about the Auxiliary sponsoring a sign to combat suicide.

"We have a member who lost her child to suicide," Lett said. "Within our small community and our membership, suicide is close to home for us, unfortunately, and we can't help them if they're not here."

The Odessa, Mo., community, located about 36 miles east of Kansas City, has been "very supportive" of the sign, according to Lett.

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“We always let them know what we’re fundraising for, and they’ve been very supportive of it,” Lett said.

Lett said the sign, which costs about \$150 per month, is funded through the weekly taco nights at Post 5675. Other Auxiliaries in the district also have donated. Post 5675 also donated \$1,000. Post Commander Sean Brown said everyone at the Post knows someone who has attempted or committed suicide.

“All of us thought, even if [the billboard] just saves one life, it’s worth it all,” said Brown, who served in Iraq (April 2006-March 2007) with the 308th Trans. Co. out of Lincoln, Neb., and Afghanistan (April 2010 – Feb. 2011) with the 425th Trans. Co. out of Salina, Kan., as a motor transport operator on both deployments.

Brown said he sees the importance of the sign from “two different sides” — having served himself and being involved with the Auxiliary’s efforts.

“I also had a little depression run in back in 2011, so it basically puts the message out there to other vets, ‘Hey, you’re not going at this alone. There’s people that are thinking about you,’” Brown said.

The Iraq and Afghanistan veteran said if veterans kill themselves, their children “aren’t going to know the type of person they were.”

“They may know what patriotism is, but they won’t know it from that same standpoint,” Brown said.

Lett said the Auxiliary hopes to keep the billboard up “as long as I can maintain it.”

“I have had several other Auxiliaries call me, and they are going to use my artwork and put some more billboards up, which made my day,” Lett said.

The other billboards, one in St. Louis and another in Knob Noster, Mo., were expected to be along highways within a couple months, Lett said in September.

“I just hope that it saves more lives,” Lett said. “I think there should be one on every highway. I think that sign should be on the back of every bus seat.”

This article is featured in the November/December 2017 [Checkpoint](#), and was written by [Kari Williams](#), associated editor, VFW magazine. Photo by [Amanda Cook](#), editor, VFW Auxiliary magazine