

Movers and Shakers: Kennebunk police chief 'tireless' in opioid recovery effort

By Donna Buttarazzi

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KENNEBUNK -- In the past year, more than 400 people have been trained in overdose recognition and response thanks to the tireless efforts of Kennebunk Police Chief Bob MacKenzie -- and he's just getting started.

"It took decades to get where we are with the opioid crisis," he said. "We're not going to solve it overnight. We need to continue to get people involved and working together."

As a 30 year law enforcement veteran, MacKenzie understands the power of addiction and what it does to a family and a community.

"I've been in public safety since I was 14 and I've seen a lot. I've seen what substance misuse has caused. I've seen so many years of trauma, death and broken families. It's the root of so many of our problems in society," he said.

MacKenzie decided to use his connections to Rotary to start a recovery initiative aimed at reducing the stigma of substance use disorder and give hope to recovery.

He started his efforts in Kennebunk last fall, training members of the Kennebunk Rotary Club in recognizing and responding to an opiate or heroin overdose. The training included how to administer Narcan alone, or Narcan and compression-only CPR to revive an overdose victim.

"I thought Rotary was a good fit. These are community leaders, and if you want to change something like this, the solutions need to come from within the community," MacKenzie said.

"The federal government isn't going to solve this. The state isn't going to solve this. These are our neighbors, co-workers, family members, and friends. We're going to solve this at the local level."

Since launching his recovery initiative, MacKenzie has held trainings for the Captain's Club at Kennebunk High School, and several organizations throughout the community and beyond.

Tirelessly traveling across Maine and New Hampshire and beyond, MacKenzie has spoken before dozens of Rotary Clubs, urging them to join the effort, and has received tremendous support.

Kennebunk Town Manager Mike Pardue said MacKenzie "leads by example. He leads from a position of high moral and ethical character, is a good listener and demonstrates compassion for others. His tireless work to advance the Opioid Recovery initiative in Kennebunk, and beyond, are applauded."

MacKenzie has secured grants and worked with other organizations to provide free Naloxone to people who have been trained to administer it. Across Maine, Rotarians and other community members carry the life-saving drug thanks to his efforts.

Future plans as he continues on this crusade include developing a recovery coaching course specifically for first responders. Police officers are often the only contact an addict has with someone who could offer them help, and hope.

"If we can just open the door just a crack for them, to let some light in, to show them there are resources when they're ready, that could be enough to plant the seed that eventually grows into recovery," MacKenzie said.

He also wants to take the recovery initiative international through Rotary International. He's hoping the organization will take on the opioid crisis with the same commitment they took on polio in the 1950's.

"I am afraid that we will continue to see more and more of these deaths in our community if we do not pull together to combat it. There is hope for recovery. I've seen it first hand, several times over," he said.

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