

Coalescing the Coalition:

Addressing the Rural/Urban Dichotomy in Suicide Rates



CCLHO Semi-Annual Meeting

S. Todd Stolp M.D.

October 22, 2009

TABLE 5
DEATHS DUE TO HOMICIDE
RANKED BY THREE-YEAR AVERAGE AGE-ADJUSTED DEATH RATE
CALIFORNIA COUNTIES, 2002-2004

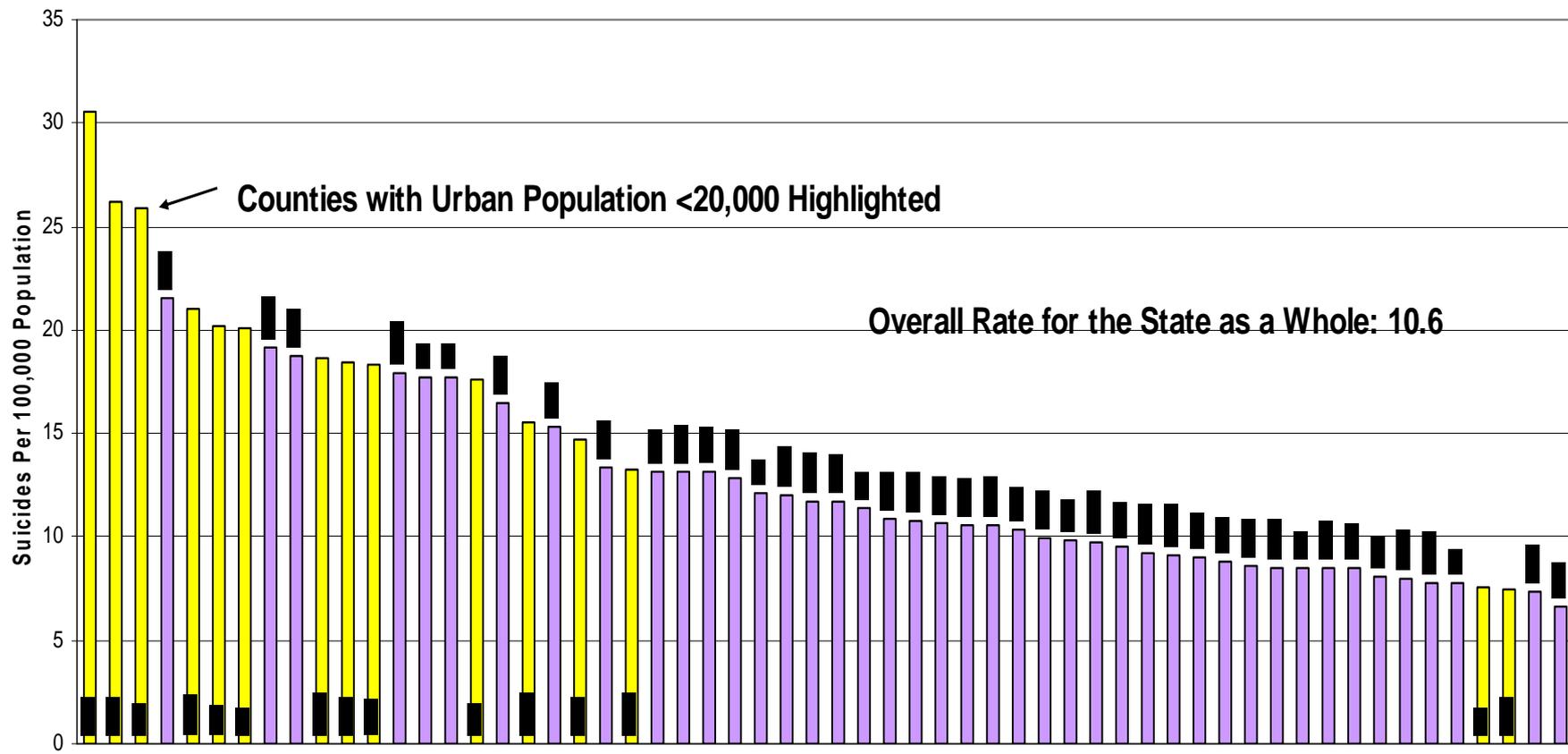
RANK ORDER	COUNTY	2003 POPULATION	2002-2004 DEATHS (AVERAGE)	CRUDE DEATH RATE	AGE-ADJUSTED DEATH RATE	95% CONFIDENCE LIMITS	
						LOWER	UPPER
1	COLUSA	20,026	0.0	0.0 +	0.0 +	-	-
2	MARIPOSA	17,896	0.0	0.0 +	0.0 +	-	-
3	MONO	13,443	0.0	0.0 +	0.0 +	-	-
4	MODOC	9,541	0.0	0.0 +	0.0 +	-	-
5	SIERRA	3,563	0.0	0.0 +	0.0 +	-	-
6	ALPINE	1,268	0.0	0.0 +	0.0 +	-	-
7	AMADOR	37,074	0.7	1.8 *	0.9 *	0.0	4.1
8	GLENN	27,626	0.3	1.2 *	1.0 *	0.0	4.3
9	PLACER	285,336	4.3	1.5 *	1.5 *	0.1	2.8
10	SANTA BARBARA	412,069	6.3	1.5 *	1.6 *	0.3	2.8
11	MARIN	250,252	4.3	1.7 *	1.7 *	0.0	3.3
12	YOLO	183,602	3.7	2.0 *	1.9 *	0.0	3.9
13	NEVADA	96,923	2.0	2.1 *	2.3 *	0.0	5.5
14	SAN LUIS OBISPO	257,452	5.7	2.2 *	2.3 *	0.3	4.2
15	EL DORADO	168,227	3.7	2.2 *	2.3 *	0.0	4.7
16	DEL NORTE	26,192	0.7	2.4 *	2.3 *	0.0	7.8
17	SAN BENITO	56,605	1.3	2.4 *	2.5 *	0.0	7.0
18	SANTA CLARA	1,723,819	44.7	2.6	2.6	1.9	3.4
19	NAPA	130,920	3.3	2.5 *	2.7 *	0.0	5.5
20	SANTA CRUZ	259,220	7.3	2.8 *	2.7 *	0.7	4.7
21	TEHAMA	58,665	1.3	2.3 *	2.7 *	0.0	7.4
22	LASSEN	34,633	1.0	2.9 *	2.7 *	0.0	8.1
23	BUTTE	212,473	6.0	2.8 *	2.8 *	0.5	5.1
24	INYO	18,617	0.7	3.6 *	2.8 *	0.0	9.6
HEALTHY PEOPLE 2010 NATIONAL OBJECTIVE:				2.8			
25	ORANGE	3,001,146	86.3	2.9	2.9	2.3	3.5
26	TRINITY	13,579	0.3	2.5 *	3.3 *	0.0	14.6
27	SONOMA	473,274	18.3	3.9 *	3.8 *	2.0	5.5
28	SAN DIEGO	2,989,178	123.3	4.1	3.9	3.2	4.5
29	SAN MATEO	712,772	26.7	3.7	4.0	2.5	5.6
30	KINGS	138,763	6.0	4.3 *	4.2 *	0.7	7.8
31	VENTURA	799,114	33.0	4.1	4.3	2.8	5.8
32	PLUMAS	21,181	1.0	4.7 *	4.4 *	0.0	13.5
33	TUOLUMNE	57,120	2.7	4.7 *	4.4 *	0.0	9.9
34	SHASTA	175,421	7.3	4.2 *	4.5 *	1.2	7.8
35	YUBA	63,979	3.0	4.7 *	4.5 *	0.0	9.6
36	IMPERIAL	153,673	6.3	4.1 *	4.6 *	0.9	8.3
37	CALAVERAS	43,566	2.0	4.6 *	4.7 *	0.0	11.4
38	LAKE	62,359	3.0	4.8 *	4.9 *	0.0	10.5
39	SISKIYOU	45,081	2.0	4.4 *	5.3 *	0.0	12.8
40	MADERA	133,965	8.0	6.0 *	5.8 *	1.8	9.9
41	STANISLAUS	489,491	30.0	6.1	6.0	3.8	8.1
42	RIVERSIDE	1,758,719	105.7	6.0	6.0	4.9	7.2
43	SOLANO	416,406	25.7	6.2	6.2	3.8	8.7
44	MONTEREY	418,842	29.0	6.9	6.3	4.0	8.6
45	TULARE	392,999	25.7	6.5	6.3	3.8	8.8
46	SACRAMENTO	1,331,563	88.3	6.6	6.5	5.1	7.8
47	SUTTER	84,978	5.7	6.7 *	6.6 *	1.1	12.0
CALIFORNIA		35,934,967	2,476.3	6.9	6.7	6.5	7.0
48	MENDOCINO	89,156	5.7	6.4 *	6.8 *	1.1	12.5
49	KERN	717,332	50.7	7.1	7.1	5.1	9.0
50	FRESNO	855,459	66.3	7.8	7.5	5.7	9.3
51	MERCED	230,696	18.0	7.8 *	7.6 *	4.0	11.1
52	HUMBOLDT	129,515	10.3	8.0 *	7.8 *	3.0	12.7
53	CONTRA COSTA	1,003,704	78.3	7.8	8.2	6.4	10.0
54	SAN FRANCISCO	786,980	59.3	7.5	8.4	6.1	10.7
55	SAN BERNARDINO	1,869,219	165.3	8.8	8.5	7.2	9.8
56	ALAMEDA	1,495,367	134.3	9.0	8.6	7.1	10.0
57	SAN JOAQUIN	625,702	57.0	9.1	8.9	6.6	11.2
58	LOS ANGELES	10,047,236	1,094.3	10.9	10.8	10.1	11.4

Biostatistical Analysis

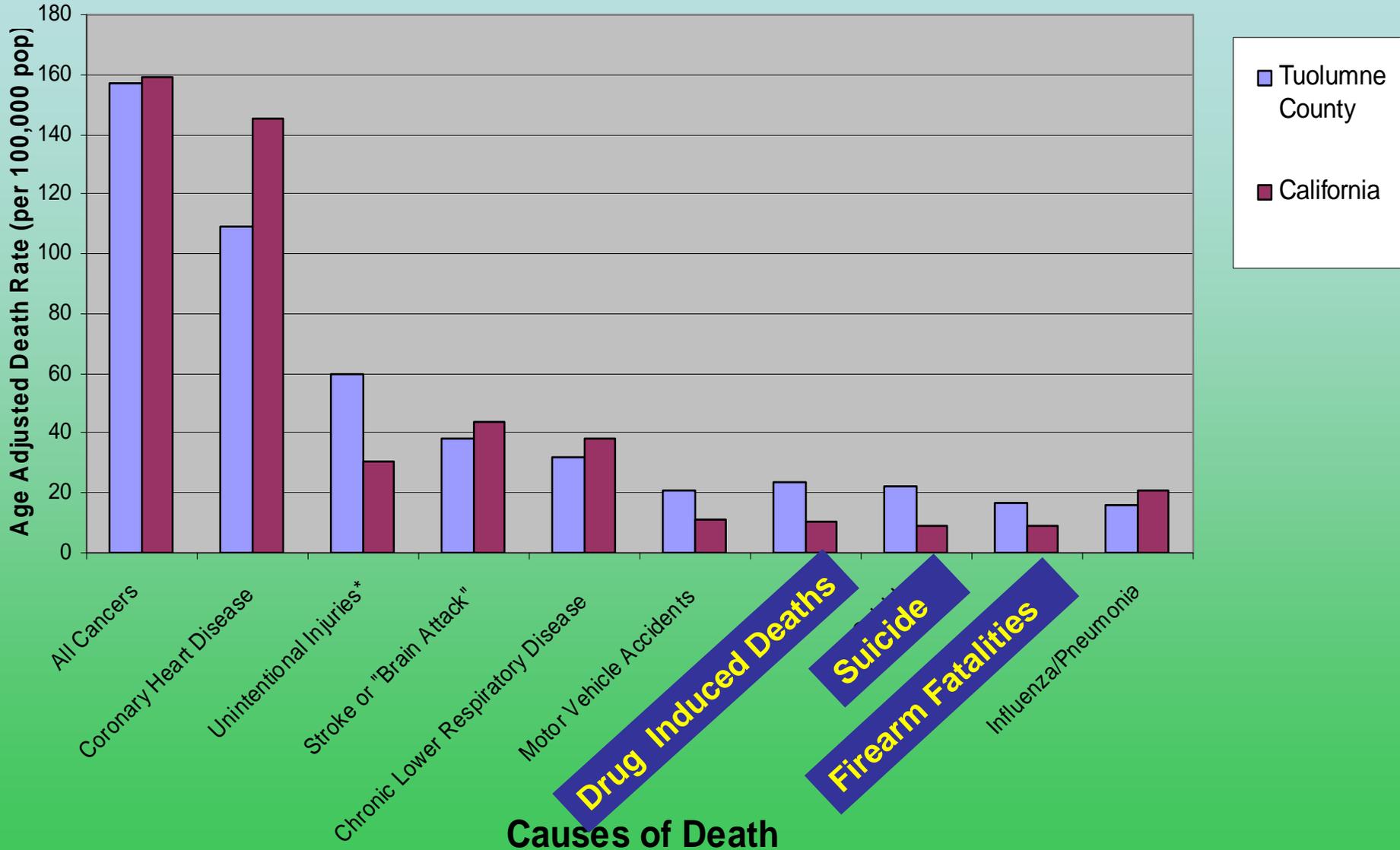
Homicide Rates in California California Counties

Total cost of epidemiologist:
59¢

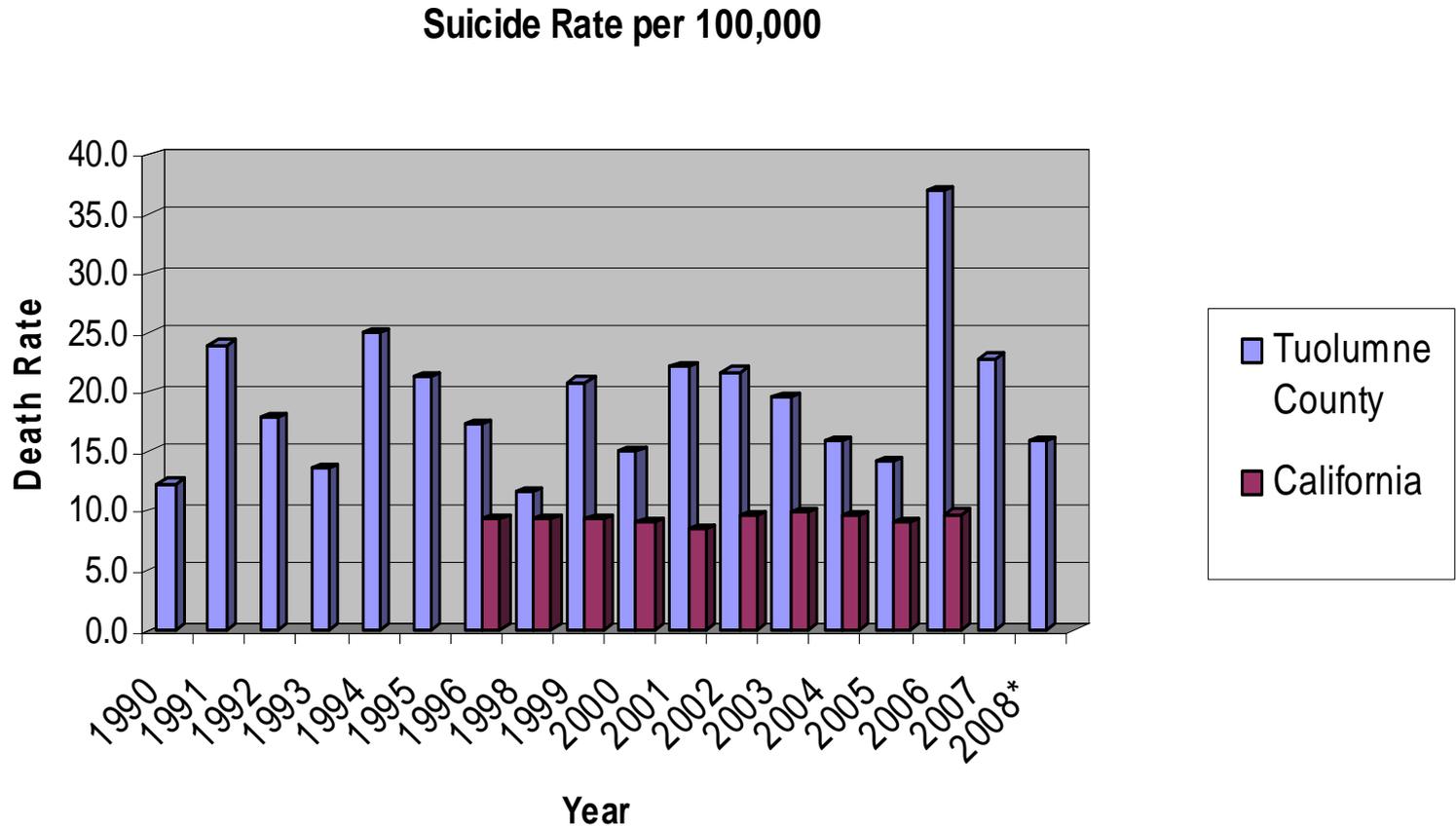
Age-Adjusted Suicide Rates for California (2002-2004) by County



Leading Causes of Death in Tuolumne County, 2005 to 2007



Tuolumne County and California Suicide Rates



Tuolumne County Suicide Prevention Task Force

APPLES
Orchard builds
core business
See Page 5B



NELSON
Artist paints a
lifetime of stories
See Page 3A



MENTOR
Longtime coach
ready to retire
See Page 1B



The Union Democrat

LEADING NEWSPAPER OF THE MOTHER LODGE

153rd Year, Number 80

Sonora, California, Tuesday, Oct. 24, 2006

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Sonora, California

The Union  Democrat

Friday, March 13, 2009 — A9

Connecticut man commits suicide in Yosemite after five-hour standoff

By ALISHA WYMAN
The Union Democrat

A Connecticut man committed suicide from the top of Yosemite Falls earlier this week after officials tried to coax him down for five hours.

His body remains missing in the icy water below Upper Yosemite Fall, authorities said.

Waterbury resident David Zerbe, 37, went to Yosemite after a jury in Connecticut found him guilty of felony making false statements and two counts

of impersonating an officer, according to the U.S. District Court in Connecticut.

Zerbe called 911 at 12:30 p.m. Monday, saying he was at the top of the falls and planned to commit suicide, park spokeswoman Kari Cobb said.

During the call, he said he had overdosed on what Cobb believes were anti-anxiety and seizure medications.

"He did appear to be a little woozy and drowsy when rangers approached him," she said.

He also told the dispatcher

he was armed, though officials have not yet confirmed if he actually had a gun, she said.

Park rangers made the two-hour hike up the 3.5-mile trail, which gains 3,000 feet in elevation, and the park requested a California Highway Patrol helicopter to assist with transporting additional rangers.

Because officials feared he had a gun, they called on the help of Tuolumne County Sheriff's Office, which sent 10 SWAT team members.

They found Zerbe on a rock

slab that extends into the creek about 50 meters from the top of Upper Yosemite Fall, Cobb said.

Rangers attempted to negotiate with him for five hours, but he jumped or fell into the water and went over the 1,400-foot waterfall, Cobb said.

The water there is snow melt from Yosemite Creek, filled with small log jams and floating ice.

"It's as close to freezing temperatures as you can get without freezing," Cobb said.

Zerbe's jury trial before U.S. District Judge Stefan R. Under-

hill concluded with a guilty verdict on Feb. 18.

Prosecutors accused him of misrepresenting information on a job application and saying he was a compliance officer with the Department of Labor on two occasions after he no longer worked there, said Zerbe's federal public defender, Robert Golger, of Fairfield, Conn.

Zerbe faced anywhere from zero to 11 years in prison. "I don't even know if the government was going to pursue a period of incarceration," he said.

Sentencing was scheduled for May 8.

Zerbe's body remains missing despite searchers' efforts to recover it Tuesday and Wednesday, Cobb said.

"The area where the body is thought to be is really steep and icy," she said.

It is also dangerous since ice that forms on the wall overnight begins to melt when the sun hits it and often falls into the search area.

"It's not a place you want to be," Cobb said.

Gottschalks

Tuolumne County Suicide Prevention Task Force

- 1984.....YES Partnership launched with Kaiser Grant funding to address a series of suicides in local youth
- 1990s.....Suicide rate in Tuolumne County fell generally within national levels, but remained among the higher rates in California
- 2006-2007.....In response to an increase in suicide rate, multiple local agencies analyze data. Issues are presented to the California Rural Health Policy Council.
- January - April, 2007.....Suicide Prevention Steering Committee and Task Force meetings are conducted to coordinate expertise and plan solutions
- July, 2007.....Tuolumne County suicide rate remains high, exceeding the rate during 2006
- April 2008..... Draft *California Strategic Plan on Suicide Prevention*, California Suicide Prevention Plan Advisory Committee, is released

Community Representation on the Suicide Prevention Task Force:

Task Force participants included individuals from:

- Public Health,
- Law Enforcement,
- Non-profit agencies,

Mission Statement: “to coordinate the planning, implementation and monitoring of projects throughout Tuolumne County that prevent and reduce the risk of suicide incorporating the core values of integrity, accountability, compassion, collaboration and professionalism.”

- Office of Education,
- Local hospital,
- Medical practitioners,
- Recreation Department,
- Community members, some with personal experience with suicide in their families.
- Faith-based organizations,
- Probation,
- Human Services Agency,
- Child development agencies,

Conceptual Challenges

Estimating the correlates of suicide rates across temporal or spatial units of analysis is a straightforward matter of calculating descriptive statistics. Policy analysts and policy practitioners require more than this. Correlation, after all, does not imply causation.

Data collection included:

- 1) Macro-level population data
- 2) Micro-level descriptors collected from psychological autopsy data
 - Individual case histories for patients 24 years old and younger are reviewed through the Tuolumne County Multi-agency Death Review Team
 - Case histories for patients over 24 years of age are reviewed by the coroners office, death certificate screening and Behavioral Health case review

Identifying the Theoretically Relevant Explanatory Variables

- Anderson, R.N., & Smith, B.L., Deaths: Leading Causes for 2002. *National Vital Statistics Reports*, 2005, 53(17). Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics
- Toxicology Testing and Results for Suicide Victims – 13 States, 2004, *MMWR* November 24, 2006, Vol. 55, No. 46
- Homicides and Suicides – National Violent Death Reporting System, 2003-2004, *MMWR* July 7, 2006, Vol. 55, No. 26
- Gould, M. et al, *Youth Suicide: A Review*, *The Prevention Researcher*, September 2006, Vol. 13, No. 3
- Singh, G et al *Increasing Rural-Urban Gradients in US Suicide Mortality, 1970-1997*, *Am Journal of Pub Health*, July, 2002, Vol. 92, No. 7
- Hirsch, J., A Review of the Literature on Rural Suicide, *Crisis*, 2006, Vol. 27(4): 189-199
- S.K. Goldsmith et al., *Reducing Suicide: A National Imperative*, Institute of Medicine, 2002, The National Academies Press, Washington DC
- Kushner, H.I. and Sterk, C.E., *The Limits of Social Capital: Durkheim, Suicide and Social Cohesion*, *American Journal of Public Health*, American Public Health Association, Vol. 95, No. 7, July 2007
- Gordon, R. (1987), 'An operational classification of disease prevention', in Steinberg, J. A. and Silverman, M. M. (eds.), *Preventing Mental Disorders*, Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1987.

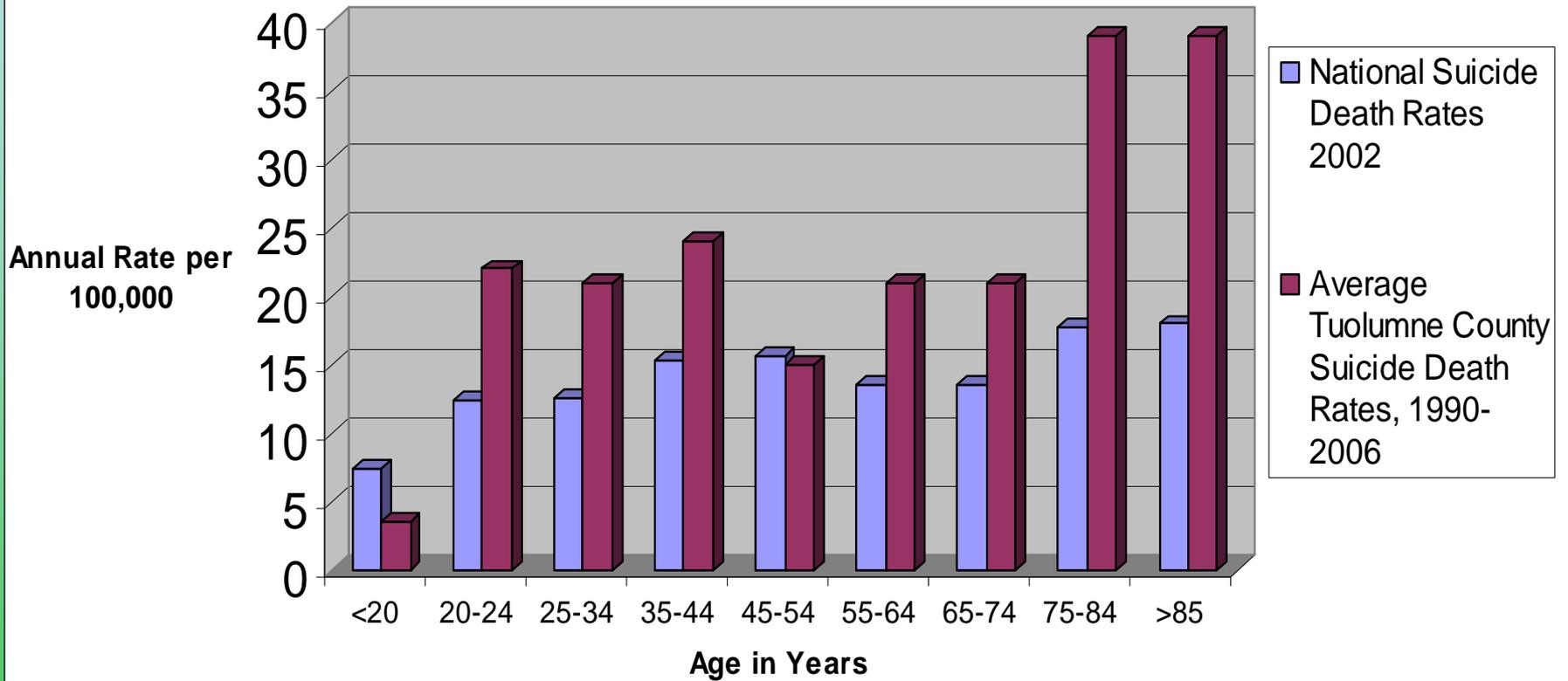
Research Design

- Population variables with potential relevance to suicide rates were identified
- The 2001-2005 time period was selected for data collection
- Criteria for data selection included:
 - 1) potential correlation between the variable and suicide rates,
 - 2) availability of the data, and
 - 3) accuracy of the data
- Formal data analysis was conducted to identify key correlates to suicide in California and Tuolumne County populations.

Highest Suicide Rate Counties in California

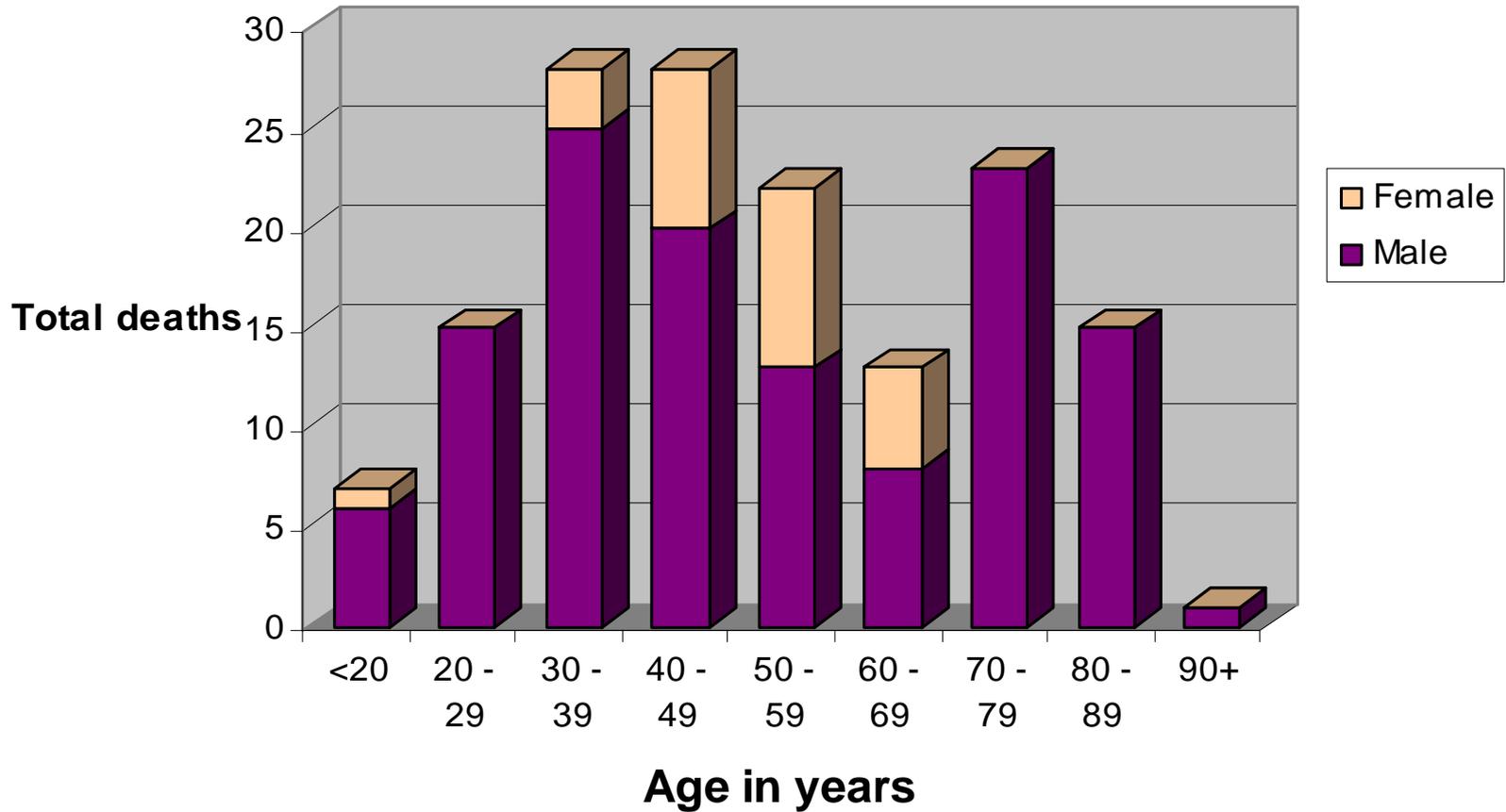


Tuolumne County and National Suicide Death Rates



Tuolumne County Suicide Study:

Tuolumne County Suicides by Age & Gender (1990 -2006)



Data Sets Collected: “Explanatory Variables”

- County Population, DHHS 2002-2003
- Age-adjusted Binge Drinking Prevalence Among Adults in California, 2001
- California County Population by Race: White, Black, Native American/Pacific Islander, Asian; 2000 Census
- Number of households receiving Food Stamps, 2004
- Per Capita Annual Personal Income, 2002-2004
- Percent Change in Total Personal Income, 2003-2004
- Age Adjusted Death Rate Due to Firearm Injuries, 2002-2004
- Age Adjusted Drug Induced Deaths, 2002-2004
- Rural-Urban Continuum Code for California Counties, 2003

Data Sets Collected: “Explanatory Variables” (continued)

- Age-adjusted suicide rates, 2002-2004
- Age-adjusted homicide rates, 2002-2004
- Children with maltreatment, substantiations and entries per 1000, 2004
- Mean unemployment rate, 2002-2004
- Hand Gun Transactions, 2005
- Long Gun Transactions, 2005
- Percent 0-17 yrs o population with Serious Emotional Disturbance, 2000
- Percent of population under 200% of Fed Poverty level with Serious Mental Illness, 2000

Rural-Urban Continuum Codes

Code	Description
Metro counties:	
1	Counties in metro areas of 1 million population or more
2	Counties in metro areas of 250,000 to 1 million population
3	Counties in metro areas of fewer than 250,000 population
Nonmetro counties:	
4	Urban population of 20,000 or more, adjacent to a metro area
5	Urban population of 20,000 or more, not adjacent to a metro area
6	Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro area
7	Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, not adjacent to a metro area
8	Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, adjacent to a metro area
9	Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, not adjacent to a metro area

Data Analysis

SUMMARY OF LEAST SQUARES REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF THE COUNTY SUICIDE DATA

Explanatory Cluster	Adjusted R-squared	F-Stat	Akaike Information Criterion (AIC)
Substance Abuse	.59	42.28*	214.43
Violence	.55	35.51*	220.36
Ethnicity	.42	15.01*	235.26
Firearm Availability	.27	11.49*	248.20
Mental Health	.14	5.46*	257.93
Poverty	.002	0.95	266.48
Macroeconomy	-0.003	0.94	267.49

Results:

1. In these models, the “Substance Abuse” cluster provided the greatest prediction of elevated suicide rate.
2. The “Violence” model was the second highest predictor of elevated suicide rate, although homicide rates were a negative predictor of suicide.
3. The “Ethnicity” model also correlated strongly with suicide rate as an independent factor, with Native American and White ethnicity demonstrating the strongest positive correlation. African-American ethnicity was a negative predictor for suicide ($p=.059$).
4. The “Firearm Availability” model is also a strong predictor of suicide rates.

Results:

5. Rural residence strongly predicts elevated suicide rates, but proximity to a metropolitan area for an area with a small population affords some protection.
6. The “Mental Health” model was a weak but significant predictor of elevated suicide rates.
7. The “Macroeconomic” and “Poverty” models had no meaningful explanatory power relating to suicide rates during the study period.

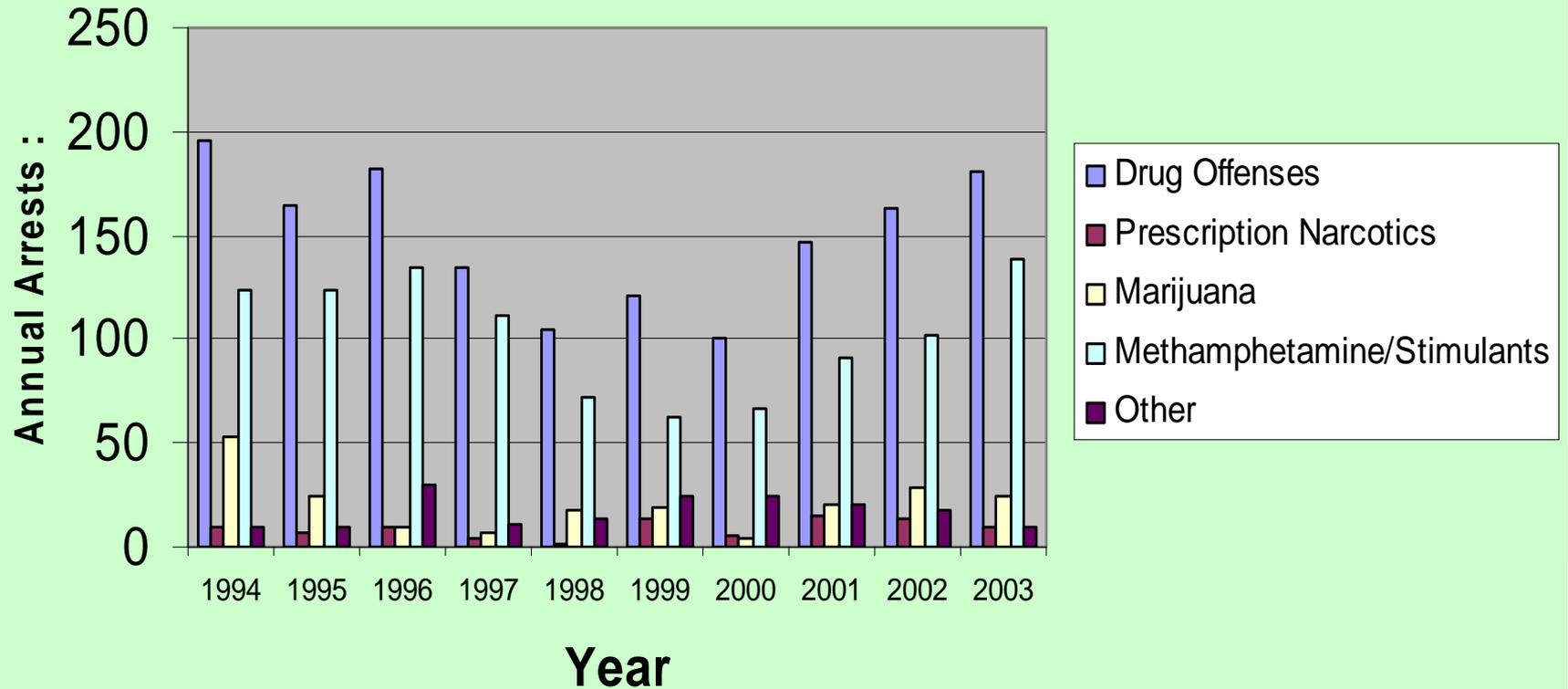
Rural Location: *Social Isolation?*



Rural Location: *Social Isolation?*



Total Tuolumne County Drug Arrests



Tuolumne County Suicide Prevention Strategic Plan

- Quarterly meetings were conducted between August, 2007, and September, 2008
- Projects throughout the community that targeted suicide prevention were presented, catalogued and included in a resource directory.
- The four strategic directions recommended by the California Strategic Plan on Suicide Prevention were used as a framework for subcommittee assignments, with “Prevention” broken into Prevention and Intervention groups:
 - 1) Development of a Suicide Prevention (and Intervention) system,
 - 2) Training and Workforce Enhancements
 - 3) Community Education, and
 - 4) Monitoring and Surveillance for Effectiveness

Tuolumne County Suicide Prevention Strategic Plan, cont.

- Four specific age groups were addressed by each subcommittee:
 - Youth (18 years and under),
 - Young Adult (16-24 years),
 - Adult (25-60 years), and
 - Older Adult (over 60 years)
- A resource directory of evidence-based prevention programs was established and prioritized over the three year planning period
- A community education plan was established to cover the three year planning period
- A Non-Profit agency was selected through an RFP process to oversee the implementation of the program.

Tuolumne County Suicide Prevention Strategic Plan

Each Evidence-based Program is described according to:

- 1) Name
- 2) Brief Description
- 3) Target audience or population
- 4) Age Group addressed in the community
- 5) Expected outcomes
- 6) Annual costs
- 7) Agency to provide oversight
- 8) In-kind contribution

Training, Prevention and Intervention Proposals

APPENDIX B SUICIDE PREVENTION STRATEGIC PLAN

TRAINING, PREVENTION and INTERVENTION EXPANDED PROPOSALS YEARS TWO AND THREE

Program	Brief Description	Target Audience/ Target Population/Presentation Group Size	Age Groups	Outcomes	Annual Costs	Agency to provide oversight	Inkind/Cash and Noncash
SOS Signs of Suicide School Based Intervention	SOS Signs of Suicide is a 2-day secondary school-based intervention that includes screening and education. Students are screened for depression and suicide risk and referred for professional help as indicated. Students also view a video that teaches them to recognize signs of depression and suicide in others, and taught that the appropriate response to these signs is to acknowledge them, let the person know you care, and tell a responsible adult (either with the person or on that person's behalf). Students also participate in guided classroom discussions about suicide and depression. The intervention attempts to prevent suicide attempts, increase knowledge about suicide and depression, develop desirable attitudes toward suicide and depression, and increase help-seeking behavior. Note the education part of the SOS program can be implemented in one class period, such as in a health class. The main teaching tools are a video and discussion guide, and a brief 7-question, non-diagnostic screening tool for depression. Students are then given the opportunity to meet with counselors following the program, for themselves or for a friend.	9 th – 12 th grade	Youth	School counselors and teachers trained and implementing curriculum by end of year one. The nationally recognized high school version, evaluated in a randomized-control study, has demonstrated a reduction of suicide attempts by 40% (Aseltine & DeMartino, 2004) and a dramatic increase in help-seeking behavior (Aseltine, 2003), a critical element in preventing suicide.	Total Cost of SOS program kit is \$300, @ 10 kits for 4 grade levels in high schools = \$3,000 (Pending additional funds for school counselors through the Student Mental Health initiative) Costs for staff training not included. A kit of materials is available that includes a staff procedure manual and training video, student screening forms, an educational video and discussion guide, and brochures on suicide and depression for students and parents. The SOS program kit provides extensive, detailed step-by-step information on how to implement the program.	Individual School Districts implementing curriculum	Unknown
Bullying Prevention Schools	The expanded Bullying Prevention Program "I Choose Respect" consists of two components: 1) A 45 minutes of education annually to 4 th grade students in 8 elementary schools in the recognition of bullying behavior, discussion of tolerance, experiential role plays in respect and empathy, intervention strategies for students using role plays, and how to get help in 209-10 2) An intensive one year bullying Prevention Program in one elementary school for grades K-8th which includes 3 components: 1) The above "I Choose Respect" program; 2) Conducting Restorative Justice Circles in which the victim of bullying behavior and the perpetrator of bullying behavior choose friends, relatives to sit in a circle and identify needs and feelings of everyone in the circle, and together develop strategies to restore balance and accountability for the incident including follow up; 3) Training teachers, staff, and students on how to conduct Restorative Circles so that the program is self sustaining. This intensive program will be conducted in a total of 2 schools over 2 years.	4 th graders in 9 schools Identified bullies and victims of bullying and teachers and school staff of Jamestown Kindergarten through 8 th graders in Jamestown Elementary School	Youth ages 5 to 12 years old	1) 400 4 th graders educated annually in "I Choose Respect" in 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 2) 500 students educated in "I Choose Respect" 5 years to 12 years old in one school 2010-2011 3) 25 core students trained to facilitate Restorative Justice Circles in one school 2010-2011 4) 25 teachers, staff able to facilitate Restorative Justice circles and provide intervention strategies for bullying in one school 2010-2011	Total of \$60,000 which includes 1) \$20,000 for school presenters in 2009-2010 and 2) \$40,000 for school presenters and trainers for intensive training and prevention activities in one school for 2010-2011	Mountain Women's Resource Center (MWRC)	\$55,000 2009-2010 \$55,000 2010-2011 if MWRC still receives money from the state

Community Education Proposals

APPENDIX C
SUICIDE PREVENTION STRATEGIC PLAN

COMMUNITY EDUCATION: CORE and EXPANDED PROPOSALS

Proposals and Implementation Category	Brief Description	Target Audience/Target Population/Presentation Group Size	Age Groups	Outcomes	Annual Costs	Year One Implementation Priority
Core – Year 1						
Poster and Flyer Distribution (years 1, 2, and 3)	Distribute and make available to broad spectrum of target audiences to increase awareness, educate and encourage people to act. Use existing pamphlets produced by national and state suicide prevention organizations. Same with posters and periodically tailor posters unique to Tuolumne County. Distribute and post flyers throughout County in bill inserts and community forum kiosks throughout the community.	<i>Posters</i> – schools/colleges, churches, hospitals, large employers both public and private, DMV, and health fairs, doctors and private providers’ waiting rooms. <i>Flyers</i> – insert in 10 ten largest County employers’ employee payroll envelopes, utility bill inserts and postings on community kiosks.	Youth, young adult, adult and elderly	All focus on quality messaging on events, education, awareness and getting people to act. Distribution of at least 200 posters and 500 flyers to businesses, schools, and public locations in year one. Posters will address suicide prevention education and overcoming stigma, and link high risk people to emergency and non-emergency behavioral health services, including providing crisis intervention phone numbers. Flyers may announce local suicide prevention events or trainings.	Moderate	High
Link Suicide and Mental Health websites	Identify up to 5 top notch suicide and mental health websites and provide these URLs and links to agencies, schools, employers, etc. to	Schools, colleges, hospital, top 25 largest employers in County, churches, organizations, government	Youth, young adult, adult and elderly	Provide on line resources to broad audience to improve awareness, education levels and ability	Low	High

Community Intervention and Prevention Projects

APPLES
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core business
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NELSON
Artist paints a
lifetime of stories
See Page 3A



MENTOR
Longtime coach
ready to retire
See Page 1B



The Union Democrat



LEADING NEWSPAPER OF THE MOTHER LODE

153rd Year, Number 80

Sonora, California, Tuesday, Oct. 24, 2006

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and harvesting the fruit. For
most homeowners, this will
ucdavis.edu or 533-5695
with your agricultural ques-
tions.

Crisis Line

24 hours a day, 7 days a week

209.588.9528

Tuolumne County Behavioral Health Services

National Suicide Prevention
Lifeline

1.800.273.TALK (8255)

www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

California
Youth Crisis Lifeline

1.800.843.5200

Call 911 for an emergency

112250-02-09-00

Sonora, California

The Union Democrat

Thursday, March 19, 2009 — A3

Students bringing Challenge Day to Sonora High

By LACEY PETERSON
The Union Democrat

A group of Sonora High School seniors are bringing the nationally renowned, barrier breaking Challenge Day to Tuolumne County.

Challenge Day is a nonprofit organization that goes on-site to school campuses and facilitates activities designed to break down social barriers between teens.

The program is designed to show students similarities they have with each other. It is an opportunity for students to learn more about each other, connect and share thoughts, feelings and experiences, organizers said.

Sonora High seniors Katie Pelfrey, 17, of Sonora, Cameron Bryant, 18, of Sonora, Megan Vaughan, 17, of Columbia, Christina Kelleher, 17, of Sonora, and Nick Belitz, 18, of Jamestown, will present Challenge Day May 5 and 6 at Sonora High and May 7 to eighth-graders at Sonora Elementary School.

The group selected 100 freshman and sophomores at Sonora High from all social groups to participate.

"We're trying to get a good cross-section of students," Pelfrey said, adding that having a selection of students that is



LACEY PETERSON/UNION DEMOCRAT

representative of the student body makes the event more effective.

During a Challenge Day event, students participate in many interactive activities — some fun, others intense and emotional — and each group will have an adult volunteer facilitator.

Pelfrey said one exercise includes a comment like "I've been the victim of domestic violence" or "I've felt bullied" and people who have had that experience step over a line on the floor.

According to the Challenge Day Web site, the program

addresses common issues among teens, including "cliques, gossip, rumors, negative judgments, teasing, harassment, isolation, stereotypes, intolerance, racism, sexism, bullying, violence, homophobia, hopelessness, apathy, and hidden pressures to create an image,

achieve or live up to the expectations of others."

Through a "shared humanity" approach, they aim to end the fear and isolation the program founders feel is at the root of destructive behavior.

Pelfrey said the program shows students that others have probably had similar hardships or experiences.

"We need to understand we're not alone," Pelfrey said. "We don't have a problem with gang violence, but we do have a problem with suicide."

The group attended a leadership conference recently in Chico and attended a Challenge Day.

"It's really hard to explain with words," Vaughan said. "It was so intense."

"It creates such a good atmosphere for your healing to release those feelings," Bryant said.

"It breaks you down and builds you up," Belitz said.

Vaughan said she was surprised to find out things about people she would have never known just by looking at them.

Pelfrey said the exercise sheds light on how multi-faceted people are. The students talked about "Fimage" or a "fear of images" many teens have, while Challenge Day questions images and stereotypes.

With the help of Friday Night Live, the group applied for a

\$20,000 grant to host the project. Half will go to the Bay Area-based Challenge Day facilitators, who charge \$3,200 per day, plus travel expenses. The other funds will go to Friday Night Live so they can have a follow-up program.

The Sonora Sunrise Rotary Club donated \$1,000 and any additional donations the students collect will go into a bank account, so the event can become a "legacy" event at Sonora High and be presented on two-year intervals, Vaughan said.

The group plans to film Challenge Day and give copies to their sponsors. They will also sell copies to raise money for future Challenge Days.

They also will host a Mexican-themed potluck dinner from 5 to 8 p.m. April 18 in the Sonora High cafeteria. There is no cost to attend, but tickets will be sold for a prize drawing.

Contact Lacey Peterson at lpeterson@uniondemocrat.com or 588-4829.

Sonora student targets child abductions as her senior exit project

By LACEY PETERSON

...dation, founded after the thought that that many kids get live in a small community

Last thoughts...

