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Mental health awareness raised in campaign

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EDITOR:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the people who supported Bill Allen and me in our campaign.

Those of you who canvassed, made phone calls, donated money, hosted events, or put out signs on our behalf ... you made a difference. Despite the loss you increased the awareness of the issues that face our community.

I would also commend our opponents, John Carpenter and Mary Pavlini, not only for the honorable campaign they waged, but also for their time and commitment to our town.

I would like to thank my running mate Bill Allen for generously sharing his knowledge of issues and introducing me around town. He was an inspiration. Charging up the street with his green library bag full of voter registration cards and brochures, Bill was always eager to knock on that next door.

And finally, I would like to thank the voters, some of whom I talked to as I canvassed. I learned a lot from you and had a lot of fun.

When I was canvassing, I rarely brought up the issue of mental health awareness. The first issues discussed were the quarry, the commuter bus, the openness of our local government.

But in those rare instances when the conversation turned to mental health - perhaps the resident recognized me and knew my story - there was 100 percent recognition that this was a significant problem in our community.

People don't allow themselves to ask for help. People don't know who to ask for help from.

My vision is that going to a mental health professional is as normal as going to a dentist. No one particularly likes going to a dentist, but most dutifully go, twice a year. If we have an existing relationship with a mental health professional, then in times of crisis, which every household inevitably faces - serious illness, death of a loved one, loss of job, divorce/break-up, empty nest, etc. - there would already be a relationship with a professional to turn to.

There are many obstacles in the way of seeking care, but the primary one is simply knowledge:

Am I, or is my loved one, really sick, or in need of help?

What is therapy? Does it work?

What kind of help do I need? Psychiatrist? Social worker? Psychologist? What are the differences?

How can I afford care? Will my insurance pay?

If I seek help, won't my friends and family think less of me? Will my colleagues talk about me

behind my back?

How about medications? Aren't drugs a crutch? I should just tough this out.

What are the potential consequences of not getting help?

When you're in crisis, it is particularly hard to navigate your way through these questions to someone who can help.

I want this conversation to be easier for all of us to start.

Thanks to my family and friends who provided, and still continue to provide, moral support.

BILL KIMZEY

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Basking Ridge

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