

OD deaths nearly doubled in '20

By BRADLEY A. MARTIN

Drug overdose deaths in Hickman County nearly doubled from 2019 to 2020, reaching 23 -- opioids were involved in 21 -- according to the state Department of Health's annual report.

That's a 92-percent increase, from 12 in 2019. Statewide, overdose deaths increased by 45 percent from 2020 to 2021, to 3,032.

"It scares me to death," said Allen Livengood, director of Hickman County Emergency Medical Service, whose paramedics are the front-line responders when an overdose is reported.

"We have to be careful -- each one represents a person and a family," he said. "We see it over and over; I don't mean to be callous."

What's missing, several professionals who deal with drugs agreed, is a

Hickman County Drug Overdose Deaths					
	All	Involving opioids	Involving opioid pain relievers	Involving heroin	Involving Fentanyl
2020	23	21	4	7	15
2019	12	7	3	2	4
2018	11	8	1	4	6
2017	5	3	1	1	1
SOURCE: TN Dept. of Health					

solution.

"If anybody could answer that, they could be a rich man," said Centerville Police Chief Shanon Irwin, who is also the chair of the 21st Judicial District Drug Task Force.

"All we can do is our best to enforce the laws."

In the Sheriff's Department, Scott Jones and Daniel Roberts are narcotics detectives. Part of their job is to conduct an investigation at the scene of every overdose death.

"A big part of the time, there's nothing to go on," because no one will talk about where the drugs came from and who else might have been involved, says Jones.

"I've told many people, in that room right there," he said, pointing to the interrogation room at the Sheriff's Department, "this is destined to repeat itself unless somebody says what needs to be said."

Naming names, in other words. But fear of reprisal, from drug providers, as well as concern about

embarrassment, short-circuits the detectives' work.

"All of our cases are still open," says Jones, who has worked in narcotics enforcement for nearly three decades. "The hard part is finding people that want to help."

Sheriff's Lt. Michael Doddo says he believes the death toll reported here for 2020 is too high; that the department hasn't seen so many deaths -- that perhaps some 2021 statistics have been added. Jones is not sure that the total number is as high as reported, either, though not all overdose deaths credited to Hickman County come through the Sheriff's Department.

Both agree that the problem is worsening. Doddo says overdoses in 2020 were driven by the issuance of government stimulus checks, as part of the pandemic.

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DISASTER: This week, DHS offers cash aid

The Tennessee Department of Human Services is making additional one-time cash assistance available to low-income families affected by the August 21 flood in Hickman, Dickson, Humphreys and Houston counties.

The program will provide \$500 for households of up to two people, \$750 for households of three to four people, and \$1,000 for households of five or more. This money is available to families who live or work in the four counties.

Applications in Hickman, Dickson, and Houston counties will be accepted on-line at [tdhs.service-now.com](#) beginning at 8 a.m. on September 20 through 4:30 p.m. on September 24. In Humphreys County, the application period ended September 17.

CFMT gives \$10,000 grant to Kedron

Kedron United Methodist Church is among 11 organizations that have received immediate flood relief grants from the Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee.

The Pinewood church, which continues to operate a supply center for those affected by the August 21 storm, received \$10,000 of the \$200,000 that was distributed through the Tennessee Emergency Response Fund.

Of the total, \$150,000 has been distributed to churches and agencies in Humphreys County, which suffered the brunt of the flood's impact.

Grants from the Tennessee Emergency Response Fund aid nonprofits and faith-based organizations that are directly assisting flood survivors with their immediate needs.



Cleaning up

Boom trucks prowled through the Pinewood Community last week, picking up large debris like this outbuilding at The Ranch. Franklin, Brentwood, Columbia and Mt. Pleasant provided equipment through a mutual aid agreement. The debris is being deposited at the Hickman County Solid Waste demolition landfill, which obtained a special permit.

August 21 flood FEMA financial support as of Sept. 10					
	Applications	Inspected	Individual Households	Housing Assistance	Other needs
Hickman	105	71	\$139,371	\$129,468	\$9,902
Dickson	105	70	\$87,069	\$75,947	\$11,121
Humphreys	1,184	964	\$4.011M	\$2.968M	\$1.042M
Houston	104	65	\$82,978	\$80,955	\$2,023
SOURCE: FEMA					

Aid provided

The Federal Emergency Management Agency provided this financial support to families and individuals in the four-county area affected by the August 21 flooding, as of September 10.

Early vote continues

Through the first three days of the early voting period, 49 citizens had cast ballots in the Town of Centerville's October 2 election.

Early voting continues weekdays from 9 to 4, and Saturday from 9 to 12, at the Hickman County Election Commission office.

September 27 is the last early voting day.

Voters are asked to choose among three candidates for mayor: Gary Jacobs, the two-term incumbent; and Tim Luckett and Derek Newsom, both aldermen.

Five ward seats also are on the ballot, though only the Ward 3 seat is contested, between incumbent John Wilson and challenger Josie Blystad.

Opinions

From the porch

A startling, if true, drug story

By BRADLEY A. MARTIN

It's not been confirmed that the following scenario is happening around here, so I did not include it in the front-page report about drug overdose deaths.

But it's so startling that you should be aware of some of what our narcotics detectives are hearing about:

Fentanyl parties, "where six or seven people get together," with the lethal drug along with some Narcan and what he described as a "designated driver." That's the person who does not partake but is prepared to apply Narcan "to bring someone in the group back after an overdose."

You would hope that the designated driver would at some point get disgusted with the absurdity of such an event and tip off a cop, or someone who can pass it to the right place.

More likely, the group will literally die off, because these are not rocket scientists.

Luckily, such parties are myths at this point.

"We've heard of this," Jones said.

Solution

Of course, the problem with addiction is that until the addict decides to pursue a drug-free life, there's not much anyone can do.

Can we encourage such behavior? AA and NA try to do that.

At least out of curiosity, I would encourage you to attend the Booker D. Foundation's meeting on October 1, where addiction is front and center. It's the only public group of volunteers trying to make a dent, and you may be able to help.

I could not help but recall a suicide crisis in 2003, when we had a record 13 suicides, and a group of citizens came together and decided they could have an impact by raising awareness, teaching the signs of impending suicide, giving folks a way to grieve.

I don't think drug addiction is quite the same thing, but when a community comes together (witness: floods), things have been known to improve.

We have nothing to lose, and I must reiterate here that our absent friend, Superman, still is not expected to show up and save us.

Meetings

Technically, the Board of Education does not meet between early August and early October because of board conventions and superintendent meetings.

This year, no such luck. I think tonight's work session -- to meet with construction manager candidates -- makes the fourth gathering since early August.

Two suggestions: Abandon the "No September meeting" policy because there's enough to be dealt with, including the timely annual election of a board chairman.

Amend the board policy on announcing special meetings, which amounts to this: Put a notice on the entry door of the Central Office Complex.

How many people know where the Central Office Complex is, and how many find their way by there on a regular basis to check for such notices?

I think such is not an "adequate public notice." I am happy to be copied on board meeting agendas, so I could make social media posts a couple of times, so interested folks could respond, as 75 of them did when the topic was quarantining.

Normal board policy does not allow citizens to speak at meetings -- the quarantine session was a rare exception -- and not many folks show up most of the time.

Providing a convenient way for citizens to know when their government -- an elected board, in this case -- is in action is not really asking for much.



A life filled with horses

"The sun is sinking in the west; The cattle go down to the stream; The redwing settles in the nest; It's time for a cowboy to dream; Purple light in the canyons; That's where I long to be; With my three good companions; Just my rifle, pony and me"

-- "My Rifle, My Pony and Me," by Dean Martin

By ELIZA BLUE
The Daily Yonder

In 1877, a young woman named Anna Sewell published a book entitled "Black Beauty, the Autobiography of a Horse." The book has since sold 50 million copies in 50 languages and is considered to be one of the most popular books of all time.

Anna meant her book to be a call to action for improved treatment of horses. By framing Black Beauty's story as an autobiography, readers were moved to empathize with the horse's struggles and mistreatment at the hands of humans. It worked, and the result was legislative and societal change.

One of those 50 million copies was purchased for my mother when she was a child. She read and reread the story many times, staying up too late on summer nights, engrossed in a tale from a time when horses still pulled cabs and carts, and self-propelling automobiles were a figment of the collective imagination.

Later, she read it to her own children, and I loved the story, too, though it broke my heart. I vowed one day to have a horse of my own who I would protect and honor, and who would love me and I would love back.

A few stints at horse camp, and a few trail rides while on vacation, were as close as I got until I came to live on this ranch. I was ecstatic at the prospect of getting to know the horses here, certain it was the beginning of a relationship I had been waiting to have for most of my life, based solely on the impression that Black Beauty had given me -- namely, that horses were just like humans, only better.

Imagine my surprise the first time I discovered that horses can be real jerks,

especially to one another. Bring a new horse into an established pack and the pack will make schoolyard bullying look like kindness. They bite, they kick, they chase, they scream at the newcomer as everyone tries to figure out how best to integrate the interruption to group life.

Horses can be equally obnoxious to humans, although thankfully they usually aren't -- we humans aren't part of their social fabric so it's less important to show dominance in our presence. However, I've seen plenty of horses that will buck or squeal or run away at the first sight of a bridle, or generally make life difficult for their riders.

Black Beauty's endless obedience and willingness to serve are not, it turns out, a universal trait in horses. Yes, with the training they will let us saddle them and ride around on their backs and they will go where we lead them (which I don't mean to devalue because that is pretty cool of them when they outweigh us by a thousand pounds) but it's by no means a seamless love affair.

That's my takeaway after seven years of ranch horses that I have tried to make love me but -- like so many of the men I dated in my 20s -- have made it very clear they'd rather hang out with their friends.

This week a new horse came to live on the ranch. He is mostly black with a white blaze on his beautiful, long nose and one white hock -- the exact physical attributes Anna Sewell gave her eponymous character. He is a stranger to the rest of the horses, so we haven't put him out into the pasture yet, instead letting everyone assess the situation with the safety of fences separating them.

I visit him in the warm twilight. The little kid part of my brain is still waiting to meet my equine best friend; the adult part of me knows better. He is bored and hot, swatting flies with his tail and stomping to shake them off his legs. He lets me pet him, but only if I have oats.

Relationships with horses, just like all relation-

Letters To The Editor

Letters to the Editor should contain a valid signature, mailing address and a daytime telephone number where the writer may be reached; writer's name and place of residence will be published; street addresses and phone numbers will not, except when requested by the writer. The name of the letter-writer will not be withheld from publication; unsigned letters will not be published. Only one letter per person per 14-day-period will be published. Letters endorsing or opposing political candidates are political advertising and should be directed to the advertising department. All letters are subject to editing. Letters of complaint about private businesses will be forwarded to the business and will not be published.

Deadline for submission is Wednesday at 5 p.m.

ships, grow and change over time. I am not his salvation and he is not mine, but that doesn't mean we won't be friends, learning to trust the other's good intentions over a thousand evenings of snacks and quiet dusks.

Eliza Blue lives on a ranch in northwest South Dakota. She's a musician, mom, author, and shepherd. She writes a column for newspapers in her region and produces audio commentary for South Dakota Public Radio.

Primary? Stupid.

Whoever was the cause for a Republican primary is stupid.

All it is going to do is cost the county \$25,000 to \$30,000.

JAMES HASSELL
Centerville

Why Early Literacy Matters:

Reading to a child in an interactive style raises a child's IQ by **6 points**

Contribute to Hickman County Imagination Library at the Hickman County Public Library

WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

How you can help care for elderly family

By TRAVENIA HOLDEN
Legal Aid Society

Many of us like to fantasize about how we might spend our golden years, but far fewer people take the time to confront tough legal questions related to aging.

Some wait until it's too late, perhaps because they don't know where to start, or they may have a misplaced fear of accidentally signing away their independence. This hesitation can create a burden for their children or loved ones, who eventually become forced to make major decisions quickly -- and maybe not in the way the person would have preferred.

As an elder law attorney in private practice and a pro bono attorney for Legal Aid Society, I often assist with common legal matters for the elderly, such as long-term care planning, asset management, powers of attorney, wills, conservatorships, eligibility for Medicaid, Veterans benefits and Social Security. It can be heartbreaking when people don't come to me until their situation is urgent, when I can't do as much for them as I could have a short time before.

Grandparents' Day, which was observed on September 12 this year, always is a good occasion to think about older family members and how we can help maintain their quality of life. Here's a general overview:

1. Start the conversation: The process of helping an older parent get his or her affairs in order starts by asking questions: If something happens to them tomorrow, what's the plan? Are there important documents, keys and passwords accessible and organized? Is there a will?

An elder law attorney can help identify the most pressing areas of concern and address them with the family, working to maintain a senior's autonomy and independence for as long as possible.

2. Establish a power of attorney: Do it while the loved one is competent. This document gives a trusted individual the authority to make financial, legal and health decisions on behalf of another person. A power of attorney can make it much easier for family members to sell a house, access personal information and make major financial and health decisions.

However, a power of attorney can be near-meaningless if it's not written correctly. It needs to clearly transfer specific rights from one individual to another, yet also be general enough that it can be applied more broadly.

3. Create a Plan: While estate planning involves preparing for events after a person's death, elder law focuses on maintaining quality of life while a person is still living and after death.

Developing a plan is one of the most important things that can be done to maintain a loved one's independence, safety and well-being. It allows them to decide, while they're still healthy and clear-minded, what they want to happen if they're incapacitated or bedridden. A carefully constructed plan can go into effect in a crisis situation or during a more gradual, longer-term event, such as the onset of dementia.

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Board will protect leave

The Board of Education has given initial approval to a policy that protects regular leave days for employees who are unable to work due to covid-19.

The board voted unanimously in favor of the policy, proposed by the Tennessee School Boards Association, at their August 31 special meeting. A second and final approval is scheduled October 4.

As proposed, the policy would cover the period that begins with the start of the current school year.

The policy was previously in place due to federal action, though that has expired.

The only actual cost, board member Ron Gammons said, would appear to be for hiring of substitute teachers to cover for those who are on covid-19 leave.

Form of ESSER plan approved

Five of seven Board of Education members participated in a special meeting on September 9.

Director Michelle Gilbert said the eight-minute session was long enough for the board to give its approval to a formal ESSER 3.0 spending plan for \$7.85 million in funding awarded to the Hickman County board.

Board members had approved the proposal at their July 12 meeting; this step was to match the local plan with the required federal forms. The federal submission was due on August 27.

Gilbert said the board also approved seven budget amendments.

Absent were Ron Gammons and Jim Hutchens.

"After each stimulus check, we had an influx," he said, so it's helpful that the benefit program has ended.

But the tragedies do not. "It's frustrating," says Dr. Zach Hutchens, the county's coroner, "when you get a call about a 21-year-old and she still has a needle in her arm."

The county's longest-serving physician says overdose deaths may have tailed off some in 2021 -- "I haven't sent as many young people off for autopsy" -- but the easy and cheap availability of illegal drugs is preventing any solution.

Heroin is the drug he encounters the most in overdose deaths; heroin and the more potent fentanyl are often mixed, Jones says.

"The thing is, they don't know what they're doing," the narcotics detective says.

Used to be, the substance was restricted to urban areas where folks had money to buy what was once an expensive drug, says Hutchens.

Now? "It's cheaper than getting pills from the pain clinic. . . . there's somebody bringing this crap into this county," the physician says.

Tight lips keep investigators from making long-term headway. Doddo and Jones says legislative help is needed: Second-degree murder may be charged in an overdose death -- but the specific drug and source have to be identified, which is hard when multiple drugs are involved, and tied to a suspect, Jones says.

"There's a lot of criteria," he said.

Attacking drugs and their abuse is not only a law enforcement problem, of course. Families, groups and the community have

parts to play.

In Hickman County, one tool was set aside several years ago: the Drug Abuse Resistance Education program, which presented students -- usually in fifth grade -- with information about drugs and how to "Just Say No" to those who provide them.

Irwin, the police chief, says "a special kind of person" has to be at the center of it. For 17 years, Officer Harold Choate, who retired several years ago and died recently, was that man.

But it also takes money, and while Sheriff Randal Ward and Schools Director Michelle Gilbert agree that DARE could make an impact, there has been no formal proposal in several years.

"I recall positive feedback," said Jones. "There was a lot of success."

Less funding is needed to operate support groups; Narcotics Anonymous operates here, as does Alcoholics Anonymous.

"I found something that works for me: Narcotics Anonymous," says Roger McKee, who has been clean since 1991 and leads a Thursday night NA group at Centerville United Methodist Church. "And Jesus Christ is in my life."

He has been around drug users long enough to know when an addict can free himself.

"You can't get anybody clean," he says, until the desire to get off drugs emerges. He calls that realization "a gift of desperation . . .

"When you become sick and tired of being sick and tired" is when others might be able to help, McKee says. "I can't get anybody clean; I can plant the seed. I can be there for him."

The Booker D.

OD deaths

(continued from page A1)

Foundation, formed by family and friends in the wake of 25-year-old Dalton Beard's death last fall, has a similar mission. Money raised helps cover the cost of treatment for addicts who say they are ready to reform themselves.

On October 1, the foundation will present "Our Community Fight," to provide discussion, information and resources about drug addiction. The 5 p.m. program will take place at the East Hickman Community Center in Lyles.

The forum seeks to educate the community. Addicts remain a different story, it appears, until "the gift of desperation" arrives.

"Most people understand the dangers; they just don't care," says Jones, because the pursuit of a narcotic high is so strong.

He says his first question to a heroin user is when his or her next fix is needed -- because heroin addicts become dangerous as the moment approaches without one.

"At least 80 percent of people who have OD'd and lived will overdose again," Jones says.

Why Early Literacy Matters:

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SOURCE: Hickman Co. Board of Education

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