



March 8, 2021

Dear Fellow Firearms Dealer,

As business owners and gun enthusiasts, we are all concerned about the safe use of firearms. This package of information is sent to you because we want you to join me and Safe Communities Madison-Dane County, along with the Captain John D. Mason Veteran Peer Outreach Program, on behalf of the Southeastern Wisconsin Suicide Prevention Taskforce and BeThereWis.com, in preventing suicide.

We are losing more than 800 people a year to suicide in Wisconsin and 1 in 5 is a Veteran. More people die by suicide using a firearm than any other means with about 70% of Veterans using a firearm to kill themselves and about 50% of non-Veterans suicides are from a firearm. Suppose the people who know guns and their customers the best, were able to recognize a person in crisis and help them? You could save lives.

The Gun Shop Project, a campaign out of New Hampshire, was successful in reducing suicides by bringing suicide prevention specialist and firearm dealers together and designing materials to help gun dealers identify and address potentially suicidal customers who may be purchasing a firearm.

I am encouraging you to participate in this cause by accepting the materials we have sent you. I would also encourage you to offer low cost gun storage for people in crisis along with other states that have joined the Gun Storage cause like, Pennsylvania (Hold my Guns), Colorado and Washington.

The Captain John D. Mason Veteran Peer Outreach Program is providing you these **free** materials. Gun shop retailers and range workers are excellent at answering questions and providing information to assist in a sale or rental; these materials work off that knowledge by:

- **Question and Answer sheet:** an educational tool that explains the role of firearms and suicide prevention to you and your staff
- **Tip Sheet for Wisconsin Retailers and Range Owners:** a review of how to look for potential suicidal red flags, such as a distraught customer whose comments are troubling ("I won't be needed a cleaning kit", or "I don't care what caliber it is") and ways to offer safe options
- **Posters from the National Shooting Sports Foundation:** by displaying a sign in your store, customers feel like they are in a place of safety where they can pick up life-saving resource materials and feel free to talk about this issue.
- **Gun Safety the 11th Commandment:** a guide for you to give your customers with every purchase that promotes general guns safety and storage
- **Contract for Gun Shops and Gun Owners:** Sample contract for you to use for storing guns for individuals.
- **Agreement to Participate in the Program:** This agreement confirms that your establishment will comply with all laws for providing temporary storage of firearms to your customers, be listed for no charge on the Wisconsin Gun Shop Project and Safe Storage Program Map at BeThereWis.Com as a preferred gun shop, and that you are volunteering to provide this service.
- **Certificate:** a certificate appropriate for framing that certifies your gun shop is part of the Program and a member of the "Coalition of Veteran-friendly Gun Shop Owners."

Gun shops are a place where expert advice can be offered about safe storage and gun safety. Gun stores are like the family home of people who enjoy all kinds of shooting sports whether it is for hunting, target shooting, personal or home protection, or competition. There are safety guidelines that must be followed, and you can be the first line of defense to recognize someone who may be suffering from suicidal thoughts. That home needs to take care of the family by taking a leading role in suicide prevention.

Caring for family and friends who are in crisis is what a family does and gun stores can be the place of support in keeping guns out of the hands of people during a brief suicidal crisis by taking the time to talk to customers and really get a sense of their mindset when buying a firearm. This is about education and suicide prevention; something we all can believe in.

As a Veteran and a Gun Shop owner I became the first Gun Shop in Southern WI, and Dane county to start working with Safe Communities of Dane County when approached over three years ago. At the time this initiative hit close to home for me as a shop owner because we had been contacted recently by Dane County Sheriff's Office regarding an individual whom had purchased a handgun from us not two weeks before and used it to die by suicide.

Less than a month later I received news that a second customer who was a Veteran had also taken their life with a firearm, even after reaching out for help. At this news I honestly cannot tell you the guilt that my family felt wondering if we could have noticed something that was amiss in our interactions with our customers, and second guessing how we handled the transactions. To this day we aren't sure, but we had a way to tell but we have changed our interactions with our customers to try and be more aware of their mindset.

With the news of both of these incidents I worked directly with Safe Communities to not only educate people in the firearms industry with the Gun Shop Project on the signs of someone who may be in a time of crisis, but also to help limit access to a major means of suicide by offering a discrete and simple way to store their firearms without having to resort to turning them over to law enforcement, or be forced to have someone that they may not want to be aware of their situation involved in the storage of their firearms.

With that we began the Safe Storage Initiative, we offered storage at our Gun Shop for someone who may need a time out from their access to them but still as a law abiding citizen deserve our respect and discretion in the matter. We purchased a specific safe to be able to segregate the firearms and offered storage with a minimal fee for a safety inspection until the individual was able to retrieve them after the crisis had passed.

We have, with success, implemented this program and served nine different families in the time the program has been running. We have also been able to use the safe as storage for families in emergency situations such as the Black Earth flood and in the case of a home fire. While this may not seem like a huge impact, there are nine families who are still whole, all for the cost of a few spots in a safe, and some time that is priceless!

The one thing I want to reiterate is that this program is not a measure to take firearms from law abiding citizens, but to provide a neutral non-judgmental location where people already come for firearms, repair, and training in their use. By offering this in your community YOU as a business owner and concerned citizen are providing a service that can, and will, save lives right where you live.

While we have relocated our shop to Northern Wisconsin in early 2020, we are still involved in supporting both of these projects and working to bring them into use here in Park Falls WI and Price

County as well. If you have questions or need input from someone in the industry who has successfully implemented these lives saving community services, please feel free to reach out to me via phone or email.

Sincerely,

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Promoted by the Captain John D. Mason Veteran Peer Outreach Program, on behalf of the Southeastern Wisconsin Suicide Prevention Taskforce and BeThereWis.com.

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<https://www.veteranpeeroutreach.org>

<https://www.facebook.com/CaptainJohnDMasonProgram>

[https://www.betherewis.com/Gun Shop Safety & Storage Project](https://www.betherewis.com/Gun%20Shop%20Safety%20&%20Storage%20Project)