



SUICIDE PREVENTION ACTION NETWORK USA
Opening Minds. Changing Policy. Saving Lives.

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SPAN USA Honors Former SAMHSA Administrator Charles Curie

Awards Presented to Local Suicide Prevention Heroes During National Awareness Event

Washington, D.C. (September 8, 2006) — The Suicide Prevention Action Network (SPAN USA) today honored **Charles Curie, M.A., A.C.S.W., former administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA)**, with an Allies for Action Award.

Curie was singled out for his success in establishing suicide prevention as a public health priority by including suicide prevention as a priority program area for the agency. Additionally, he launched a national suicide hotline, awarded grants under the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act for youth suicide prevention programs and created the national Suicide Prevention Resource Center. In August 2006, SAMHSA and SPAN USA announced a public-private partnership designed to move the goals of the 2001 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention (NSSP) from paper to practice. Working together, SAMHSA and SPAN USA will engage other stakeholders to establish and administer the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention.

“Charlie Curie not only talked the talk, he walked the walk when it came to advancing suicide prevention programs at SAMHSA,” said Jerry Reed, SPAN USA executive director. “Through his personal leadership, he helped raise awareness about suicide prevention both within the agency and among the public at-large.”

Other Allies for Action Awards were presented to local suicide prevention leaders for their efforts to help establish suicide prevention as a public health priority. The awards were given to the honorees during a luncheon for SPAN USA’s 11th annual National Awareness Event, which brings suicide prevention advocates from across the country to Washington, D.C., to receive training, participate in a public awareness event and to raise awareness with lawmakers and advance suicide prevention policies such as full funding for the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act and the passage of mental health parity legislation.

In addition to Curie, recipients of the Allies for Action Awards included:

- **Michael F. Hogan, Ph.D., of Columbus, Ohio**, who is the commissioner of mental health for Ohio and who chaired the President’s New Freedom Commission on Mental Health. As a strong advocate for implementing the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention and other suicide prevention priorities, Hogan led the state of Ohio in increasing community mental health resources by more than \$700 million since 1990;
- **The Jason Foundation of Hendersonville, Tenn.**, which teaches high-school age students, teachers and parents about the warning signs of suicide and about suicide prevention. Clark Flatt, founder of the Jason Foundation, is a living example of SPAN USA’s theme of turning grief into action. The foundation began in 1997 when Flatt’s son Jason died by suicide. Today the foundation funds programs in 27 states and has 50 affiliate offices across the country; and
- **The Tennessee Suicide Prevention Network in Nashville, Tenn.**, the statewide organization responsible for implementing the Tennessee Strategy for Suicide Prevention, as defined by the 1999 Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Prevent Suicide. The organization has arranged a strong statewide network of suicide prevention resources, establishing one of the country’s best-organized state initiatives.

“Suicide has a devastating impact on individuals and communities around the world,” said Jerry Reed, executive director of SPAN USA. “We are proud to honor individuals who are leaders not just in increasing awareness, but also in promoting public policies that help advance suicide prevention in their communities and across the country.”

The Founders’ Award

Tom O’Clair of Schenectady, N.Y., received this year’s Founders’ Award for his determination to push mental health parity in New York after the death of his 12-year-old son Timothy. Known as Timothy’s Law, legislation currently before the New York State Legislature would mandate that insurance providers covering any health care services must also provide comparable coverage for mental health services. When O’Clair’s medical benefits ran out, he made the difficult decision to give up custody of his son so that the boy could qualify for Medicaid. Timothy later died by suicide in 2001 while in state custody.

SPAN USA Sandy Martin Grassroots Awards

The SPAN USA Sandy Martin Grassroots Award is presented to “unsung heroes” working at the local or state level who clearly exemplify sustained commitment to the mission of suicide prevention.

The award is newly re-named this year for Sandy Martin, who was a member of the SPAN USA Board of Directors from 2002 to 2006 and the founder of the Lifekeeper Foundation. The foundation creates Lifekeeper Memory Quilts featuring images of those lost to suicide. The quilts, which are now in almost all 50 states, give a face to the tragedy of suicide and have provided a vital way for grassroots advocates across the nation to turn their grief into action by raising awareness and honoring their loved ones. Martin’s legacy in suicide prevention will be honored during the National Awareness Event. The quilts will be on display tomorrow between 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. at the World War II Memorial on the National Mall for SPAN USA’s Memorial March to raise awareness for suicide prevention.

The four recipients of the SPAN USA Sandy Martin Grassroots Award included:

- **Bunkie Burke Rivkin of Dunwoody, Ga.**, who made many of the Lifekeeper Memorial Quilts;
- **Laura Meyer of Deland, Fla., chair of the Florida Suicide Prevention Coalition**, who works tirelessly in her community for suicide prevention. As someone who never seeks the limelight, Meyer is always there to help a family or individual in need;
- **Stephanie Weber of Batavia, Ill.**, worked to formalize suicide prevention policies in seven Illinois counties, and is the founder of a suicide survivors support group and the Crisis Line of Fox Valley; and
- **Michelle Linn-Gust of Albuquerque, N.M.**, an author and survivor of her sister’s suicide, is a SPAN USA organizer and will be co-chair of the 2007 Healing After Suicide conference in New Orleans, La., next April. Linn-Gust is also the director of the Survivors Division for the American Association of Suicidology.

“SPAN USA is thankful to have great advocates and leaders like these honorees to help us advance suicide prevention,” said Reed. “Together we are successfully educating the public and policy-makers at every level of government about the need for a national response that implements suicide prevention strategies, and making great strides in securing resources for mental health services. With the support of these strong partners, SPAN USA is moving ever closer to our ultimate goal of reducing the number of lives needlessly lost to suicide.”

SPAN USA is the nation's only suicide prevention organization dedicated to preventing suicide through public education and awareness, community action, and federal, state and local grassroots advocacy. For more information, please visit www.spanusa.org.

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