



## Habersham County Emergency Services

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The Public Safety personnel around the county, country and world stand ready to respond and aid others every day. In Habersham County, our personnel responded to approximately 10,000 requests last year, and every year that number increases. We are called upon to care for all ages, all types of illnesses and injuries, from the infant needing CPR to traffic accidents with multiple patients with varying injuries to chronic medical conditions, to those at the end of their life. No day is ever the same...No call is ever the same. We must remember, the law enforcement, fire department and EMS personnel come from a line of “tough guys and gals/old school”. Guys and gals who would rather bury the bad stuff and forget it, than talk about it. The burying of the memories, feelings and experiences build up over time and leave their mark on individuals, families and communities.

All of this takes its toll, as there is only so much a body can stand to see, hear and experience, despite all of the training they have completed. The mental health of our first responders has been a hot topic for many years as the cumulative stress leaves its mark on the profession. The stress and strain on the mental health of the personnel has been that thing, everyone agrees needs to be looked at, considered, implemented or addressed. It's the easy topic to say “yes we need to do that...” and hopes someone else steps up to take on the responsibility.

This evening, we want to recognize one of our own for taking on the responsibility. Joel Norton.

Joel is responsible for addressing the needs for the first responders not only in Habersham but also the surrounding areas.

Joel is the individual who has taken on the task of making sure our folks are taken care of after those tough calls are completed. He (and his group) has brought a PEER Support group together for those events. He has arranged for the Department of Public Health to provide Critical Incident Stress Management classes for all the departments in the county and surrounding areas.

Continuing the work, Joel came up with the idea of a “Mental Health Day” for public safety personnel. It is titled “Breaking the Silence – Time for Change.” He brought many like minded folks together and on August 21<sup>st</sup>, the event took place. Speakers, vendors, and professionals came together to discuss the mental health challenges and celebrate the victories within the public safety community.

Joel, Thank you for your hard work and diligence in keeping this matter in the forefront so we can take care of our folks, their families, and the community.