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Delafield Police Department: First to join program that aids veterans in crisis

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DELAFIELD — The Delafield Police Department is the first law enforcement agency in the state to participate in a life-saving program that provides safe firearms storage for veterans at risk of suicide.

“Live Today — Put It Away,” a program affiliated with the Southeastern Wisconsin Veteran Suicide Prevention Task Force and the Captain John D. Mason Veteran Peer Outreach Program, includes dozens of gun shops and shooting ranges around the state.

By participating in the program, the business agrees to securely store any firearms voluntarily brought in by a gun owner struggling with thoughts of suicide or harm to others. Once the crisis has passed, the gun owner can reclaim the firearms.

“Safe storage of a firearm is critical when going through a crisis,” said Susan Smykal of the Captain John D. Mason Veteran Peer Outreach Program. “If an individual does not have a trusted family member, hunting buddy, gun locker, etc., they can contact their local firearm retailer who offers voluntary, temporary safe storage.”

Until now, only private businesses have signed on to the program. But a push is on for police and sheriff’s departments to participate, and Delafield Police Chief Erik Kehl said he was eager to have his department take part.

“When I first heard about this, I said, ‘Absolutely. I want to do this,’” Kehl said. “Mental health and suicide prevention are very important to me — personally and professionally.

“I’m happy we’re able to take part in this partnership. I hope it benefits someone in the future.”

Kehl said he has seen far too many suicides in Delafield, and that providing safe storage of firearms is “the right thing to do,” saying he personally has stored firearms for family and friends in crisis.

And he was quick to dispel the myth that the program allows police to take people’s guns.

“We’re not seizing anybody’s guns,” he said. “We’re providing an outlet for those who need it.”

Smykal praised Kehl and his department for joining with “Live Today — Put It Away.”

“Delafield Police has now paved the way for other law enforcement agencies across the state to participate as well,” she said, noting that the addition of law enforcement agencies creates more options for helping those in crisis. “The bottom line is suicide prevention and offering options to fit everyone’s needs,” she said.