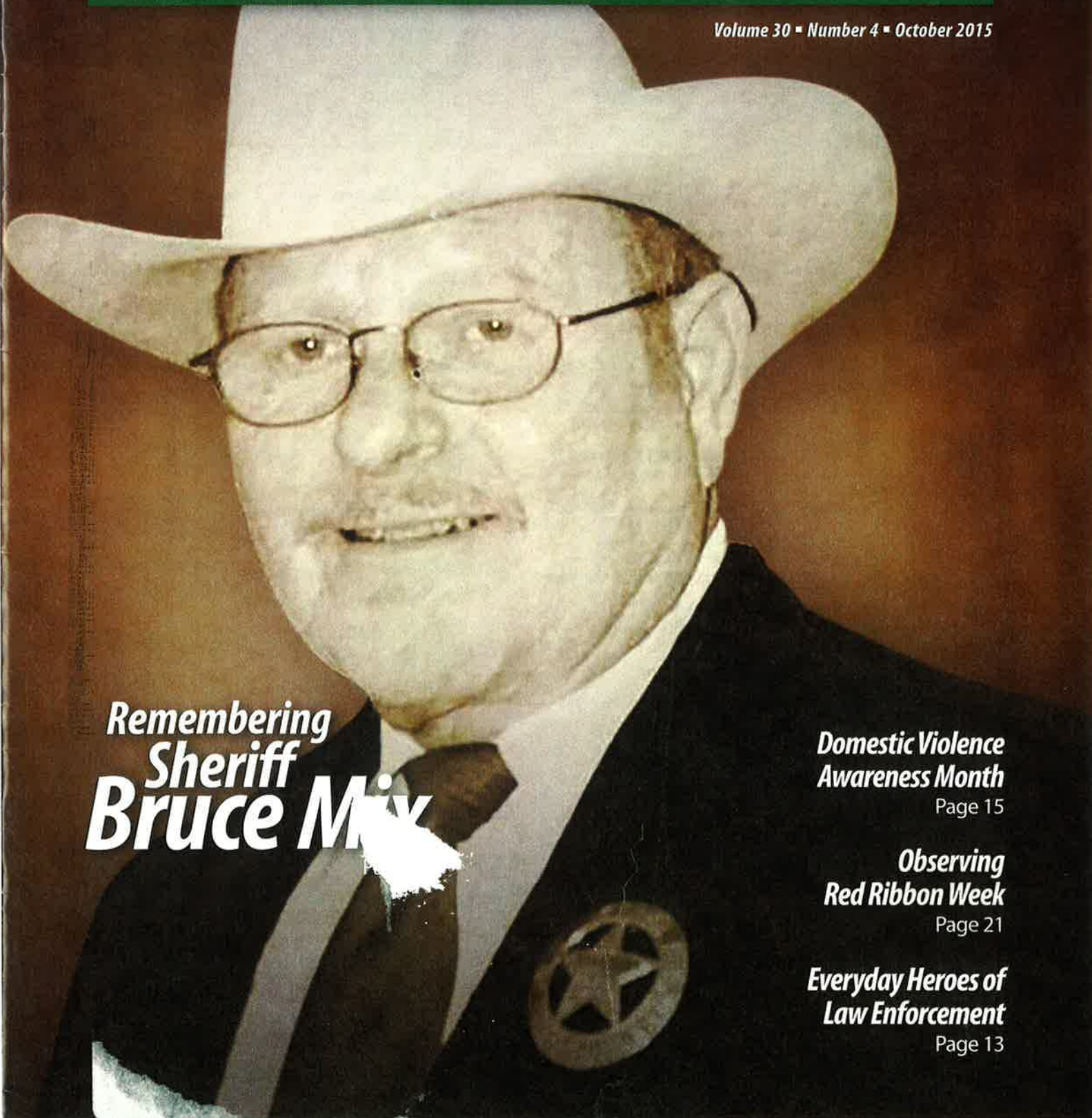


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THE IMPORTANCE OF *Resiliency & Hardiness*

▪ NANCY K. BOHL-PENROD, PH.D., DIRECTOR
▪ THE COUNSELING TEAM INTERNATIONAL (TCTI)

I recently had the opportunity to attend a certification class conducted by Johns Hopkins University on Resiliency and want to go back for more. I learned a lot and have been trying to add the subject to our peer support training courses.

Throughout my career, I have often wondered why some people bounce back from some of the worst tragedies you can imagine, and why some people fall completely apart when the event appears to be minor. What makes them different? Well, I had some of my questions answered and would like to take this time to share some of them with all of you.

We have many different stressors in our lives today that were not experienced by our parents or grandparents. Stress comes from various sources. When we are at work, we are surrounded by people that have different values, expectations, beliefs, morals and work ethic. These differences create everyday stress, not to mention the personal stressors we all encounter in our lives. Throw into the mix several distressing, traumatic critical incidents experienced at work and you now have a major stress reaction to a stressful life. This reaction could be mental, physical, behavioral or psychological, all of which cause work, social or family stress. When this stress mounts people feel more hopeless, act like victims, become bitter, act out, become more critical of their department and the decisions that are made and actually over time, become less healthy and more vulnerable. Vulnerability stops a person from growing after the stressful event. It promotes detaching from and avoiding the impact of the event. It becomes difficult to work with these negative attitudes that are exhibited by these people and of course less enjoyable to be around them. If you are a peer supporter, you know they are harder to help.

So exactly what is resilience? How do we help these people who are hell bent on seeing the world from a negative point of view? What can we do as friends, co-workers, managers, supervisors, family, and as peer supporters to help build resilience? Let me share with you some of the things I learned.

Do not believe that all resilient people are born that way. Yes, many have a "temperament" that already has a resilient quality to it. But, that does not mean that is the only reason why someone is resilient. It may not be, because they have a "gene" that determines why they exhibit resiliency. The research shows that if you use your distressing life experiences to grow, both socially and psychologically, then you can learn to be resilient.

We can nurture a new set of attitudes to help us through stressful times in our lives. Instead of letting the stressful event become the negative focus in our life, we can build on the stressful event and learn

"When one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us."

— Helen Keller



from it. This skill is called “hardiness.” It is actually the basis for resilience. How hardy are you? Ask yourself that question. Think back to some difficult times you have had in your life and how did you get through it? It is also a good question to ask as a peer supporter when faced with talking to someone who feels like giving up or who always sees the glass half empty. I learned that hardy attitudes include three very important components: control, commitment, and challenge. I learned that hardiness can be taught to those that do not have it, by teaching them about these three components to a hardy attitude. These attitudes can help you face the stressful times in your life. They will also help you better cope with a distressing critical incident. Hardiness enables you to face adversity and can help make it into an “advantages opportunity.”

When you look at the word “control” in this context, it is the ability to stay involved (not giving up). It helps you know that you can influence the outcomes of your reactions to the critical event. It can help you find positive solutions to the stress you are feeling. It can encourage you to keep going, so you can eventually look at the stressful event as a “challenge”, from which you will grow and learn from in a positive way. When you are strong in the “challenge” arena, you look at the stressful event as a way of embracing life’s challenges, which creates optimism. Commitment is staying involved with all the people (hopefully family, friends and peers) around you rather than withdrawal and try to go it alone. It means viewing your work in public safety as important and worthwhile. It means that the critical incident you were involved in,

is not going to shake your view of your job or change your passion for helping others in our communities.

Hardy people reach out to peer support and to other resources they have in their lives. They understand that engaging with others is better than alienating them. They believe that the problems they are experiencing can be opportunities to strengthen their relationships with peers, co-workers, family, or friends. Hardy people do not blame their departments or their supervisors for their circumstances. They take responsibility for their lives and use their hardiness to provide them a path to getting through the event in a more positive, healthy way. Hardiness can turn a stressful event into an opportunity to thrive and survive. So, in order to be resilient under stressful situations, you must have hardiness.

If you think someone in your life is negative and cannot seem to get over stressful events in their lives, whether it is personal or professional, talk to them about resiliency and hardiness. Talk to them about attitude adjustments that might need to be made. Encourage them to take a class, and please if you do debriefings make sure you add a phase to discuss and promote resiliency. Building resiliency can begin with your intervention skills after a critical incident. There is on-going research on this subject. I could not possibly cover everything. I hope this information can be the catalyst for you to think about the importance of the subject as peer supporters, and how you can include the subject in your peer support endeavors. Have a safe day! Thank you for all you do! ☆



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