

# TRUE STORIES

## LOS ANGELES MAN CAUGHT SPANKING HIPPO

Police are investigating after a video shows a man spanking a hippopotamus at the Los Angeles Zoo.

The video shows the man crossing a railing last week and sneaking up on two hippos, Rosie and Mara. He smacks Rosie on the rear, and her mother lifts her head as the man runs off and raises his arms in gesture of victory.

Zoo spokeswoman April Spurlock tells the Los Angeles Times that any unauthorized interaction with an animal is unsafe for the animal and potentially unsafe for the person.

Spurlock says state law prohibits entering zoo enclosures. The zoo has posted a "No Trespassing" sign on the exhibit for the first time.

## CONNECTICUT BEAR GOES TO LIQUOR STORE

A bear took a stroll into an unlikely snack venue — a Connecticut liquor store.

The mid-sized creature lumbered across a parking lot in Bristol Monday afternoon, getting close enough to the entrance of Crazy Bruce's Liquors to trigger a sensor that automatically opened an outer door.

The Hartford Courant reports video from inside shows the bear walking around the foyer while an employee locks an inner door.

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## The View

# San Miguel County and mental wellness

San Miguel County made news around the state in 2016, when it was reported that six residents died by suicide. Since then, we have experienced six more suicides, while reading about the death by suicide of celebrities, including Kate Spade and Anthony Bourdain. Nearly 45,000 individuals died by suicide nationwide (over 1,100 in Colorado) in 2016. That's more than homicide or automobile accidents claimed.

These deaths have spurred many local efforts to better understand the causes, risk factor and warning signs of suicide, and to develop responses to reduce the incidence of suicide in our communities. Local activist Samantha Damsky, who lost her father to suicide, organized Telluride's first Walk Out of the Darkness Suicide Prevention event last fall (this year's will be Sept. 30). Tri-County Health Network has increased the frequency of its trainings in Mental Health First Aid, an eight-hour class that teaches skills to laypeople to help others who might be experiencing a mental health crisis or developing a mental health disorder. Over 200 community members have taken the course this year, including teachers, county employees and community members. Despite these important efforts, we know that our communities lack adequate resources to address the mental health needs of the residents.

There are unique challenges that impact the mental well being of residents in our region. Limited and expensive housing forces more residents to commute long distances to and from their homes, hindering their ability to form strong social networks. Many of us are transplants from somewhere else and do not enjoy strong local family support. Employment is seasonal, heavily skewed toward relatively low paying jobs in retail and hospitality, and winters with limited snowfall and smoky summers impact the local economy. Health insurance is expensive, often with high deductibles. We have few mental health providers and fewer still that take insurance — only a handful of local therapists accept private insurance or Medicaid, further raising the bar for individuals to access services.

Against this backdrop, the county — along with Tri-County Health Network — created a strategic plan for behavioral health and formed the San Miguel Behavioral Health Commission to bring together stakeholders and improve access to mental health services in our county. This year, the commission recommended a new property tax dedicated to community-based mental health services. Specifically, the ballot measure, if approved

by voters, will raise funds dedicated toward the following four areas: school-based mental health counseling and programs, crisis and emergency response services, suicide prevention programs, and substance abuse treatment and prevention services.

These funds would be directed at the most pressing needs in our communities and provide a stable source of funding to allow organizations to increase the availability of existing services, as well as identify new and promising programs to help support our communities' mental wellness.

While suicide can sometimes reflect the failure of a system of care (nationwide two-thirds of individuals who attempt suicide visit a medical provider in the month before, and almost 40 percent do so within one week of attempting), it is not the only issue that confronts our communities. The absence of providers, especially those who accept insurance,

is a significant barrier to obtaining care. We cannot address the impacts of substance use disorders involving alcohol, opioids or methamphetamines with no substance abuse treatment programs in our county. Our students report higher levels of alcohol and marijuana use compared to their peers statewide or nationally, yet schools lack adequate resources to provide a robust prevention response or sufficient mental health services. Finally, the stigma of mental illness remains a significant barrier for individuals who need help.

Over one million Coloradans will experience a mental health or substance use disorder this year, and more than half will not receive the care they need. Locally, nearly one-third of individuals in a recent poll reported that either they or a loved one experienced a mental health or substance use problem in the past year. In 2018, we have experienced four suicides in our county.

We live and work in communities that are committed to ensuring the physical and mental wellbeing of all. The San Miguel Behavioral Health Commission is committed to crafting local solutions by collaborating and strategically investing our resources — from our schools and community organizations to our jails and our medical providers in Telluride and Norwood. Stay tuned for more about the ballot measure to support mental health and wellness in our county.

*Paul Reich is the behavioral health program manager at Tri-County Health Network and a member of the San Miguel Behavioral Health Commission. He can be reached at 970-708-1012 or [pmbh@tchnetwork.org](mailto:pmbh@tchnetwork.org).*

### Correction:

In a Friday Daily Planet story titled "Renovation delays result in extended leases for local businesses," it was erroneously reported that Black Bear Trading Company's lease in the Macintosh Building ran through April 2019. As of Thursday, the company's lease was extended three years to 2022.

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