

Afghan police use sticks to destroy a poppy field in Badakhshan Province. Despite such efforts, Afghanistan is the world's top opium supplier.



# Opium Wars

A KEY STEP TO SECURING PEACE WILL BE TO WEAN AFGHAN FARMERS OFF GROWING POPPIES.

58

## Taliban Attacks Heat Up in Advance of Allied Offensive in Afghanistan



**TAKING COVER:** U.S. soldiers sprint across a poppy field in Kandahar Province after insurgents open fire Sunday. The firefight, which left no U.S. troops injured, came as the Taliban set off blasts—part of a failed jailbreak—in the provincial capital ahead of a U.S. offensive there. **A10**

HERO was founded by Brian Kirk and John Roberts, two fathers who lost their teenage sons to a heroin overdose during 2009.

Following their tragic loss, these “two dads” joined together and began seeking ways to help other families who suffered the loss of a loved one due to an overdose. After a short time it became clear to both Brian and John the most effective way they could help was to make others aware of the growing heroin epidemic and support programs and initiatives that might prevent others from having to endure the loss of a loved one to drug overdose.

They are now advocates for reform seeking ways to improve our current drug policy. To that end, HERO supports the deployment of more resources for demand reduction programs such as drug prevention, drug education, and increased funding for research and treatment programs. HERO also supports the redeployment of law enforcement adjusting current strategies to focus more on drug distributors rather than drug users. Redeployment would effectively increase the present capacity for drug interdiction and help sustain an unrelenting pursuit of the true drug criminals—those persons who chose to make a profit from the delivery of harmful and poisonous substances to our communities.

Brian and John have found although they are just “two dads”, they are making a difference and it is mostly because they chose to take a stand. They are now conveying that message to others with the hope they will join the fight and also make a difference.

And to every person who joins the fight, Brian and John always point out that persons who choose to take a stand and protect others from harm are generally referred to as a HERO — so join the fight today— Be a Hero and Save a Life.

For more information about the Heroin Epidemic Relief Organization (HERO) please visit our newly constructed website: [BEAHEROFOUNDATION.ORG](http://BEAHEROFOUNDATION.ORG)

HERO

c/o John Roberts

13250 Woodland Drive

Homer Glen, IL 60491

Be a HERO

Save a Life

**Heroin  
Epidemic  
Relief  
Organization**

## Mission

*We will offer support, understanding, encouragement and hope to families who have lost a loved one due to drug overdose. We will ardently support programs, legislation, and initiatives whose intent or purpose is to reduce the harm caused by drug abuse.*

## Mission Objectives

*Offer solace, understanding, and support to the family and friends who lost a loved one due to a drug overdose.*

*Provide an opportunity to family and friends to mourn the loss of a loved one from drug overdose and to find others who are caring, sympathetic, and fully able to understand their loss.*

*Spread the word—tirelessly—about the issue of drug overdose and manner in which this lethal epidemic is sweeping across our nation.*

*Communicate a strong message to the local community about the dangers of drug overdose and the need for a comprehensive response to this lethal threat.*

*Educate people in methods to save lives by learning how to prevent, recognize and respond to an overdose.*

*Support legislation relating to overdose prevention initiatives.*

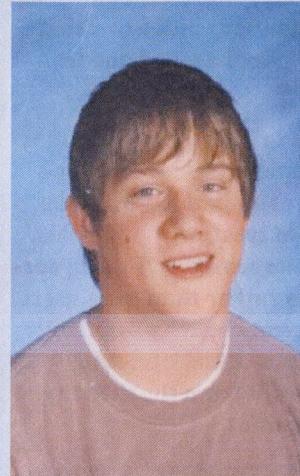
*Support drug prevention as the most rational solution to the nation's drug abuse problems.*

*Advocate for increased funding for prevention, treatment and recovery programs.*

*Develop various means to provide basic information about the range of support services available to drug users and their families that are available in their local community.*

*'Heroin is killing young people and devastating families. Please join the fight and help stop this terrible epidemic from spreading and claiming more lives.'*

**Billy Roberts**



*We lost our Billy to a drug overdose on September 20, 2009. We are learning to accept that we lost our fight to save Billy, but we decided to continue our fight because so many other young people in our community are still exposed to this threat. We will fight to raise awareness about the drug epidemic sweeping across our nation. We will steadfastly support HERO and find ways to BE A HERO AND SAVE A LIFE!*

*- John Roberts*

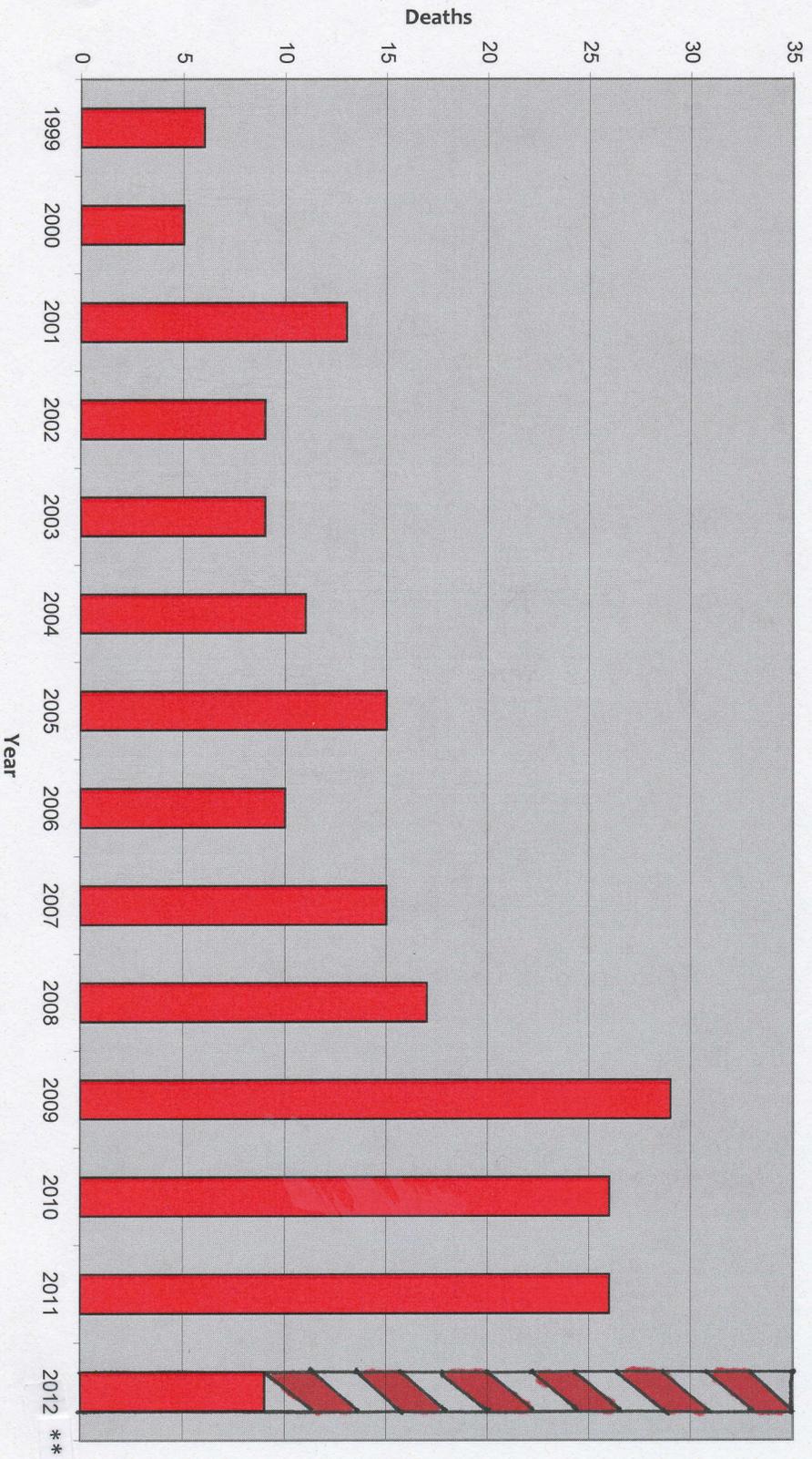
**Matthew Kirk**



*Our son, Matthew, passed away on April 3rd, 2009 from a heroin overdose, just 6 weeks before graduating from Lockport Township High School. Matthew was a good son with a good heart who tried to do the best he could but this drug was overwhelming and more than Matt could handle. As much as we tried to help Matt work his way out of this addiction, the addiction won. We cannot help Matt anymore but we can help other parents and kids by raising awareness about the drug epidemic.*

*- Brian Kirk*

# Heroin Overdose Deaths in Will County



Grateful appreciation to Will County Coroner Pat O'Neil and staff for providing these statistics.

\*\*PROJECTED # OF DEATHS FOR 2012

# Suburbia's heroin addiction

## A study says the Chicago region leads the country in abuse of the drug. We talk to an addict, a cop, a grieving mother, a landlord and a survivor fighting to stay clean

July 31, 2010|By John Keilman, Tribune reporter

If you want to understand why Chicago has the nation's most severe heroin problem, drop by a small West Side office that's right at the epicenter.

It's a [clinic](#) run by the University of Illinois at Chicago that offers clean syringes, HIV tests and other services to those buying \$10 baggies of dope on the drug-soaked streets nearby. Some of its patrons are old-timers, weary and bedraggled, their forearms misshapen with the knots and abscesses from years of shooting up. When you imagine an addict, they're probably what comes to mind.

But most who pass through the door are startlingly young: suburban teens and 20-somethings whose dalliance with the drug quickly became a consuming obsession.

After looking at hospital admissions, drug test results and overdose deaths, Roosevelt University researchers [concluded](#) recently that heroin abuse in the Chicago region is more extreme than anywhere else in the country. And young suburbanites are a primary reason.

They say the drug is alluring because it's cheap and easy to obtain. It's powerful, too, wrapping users in a numbing cocoon that seems to keep their troubles far away. That, of course, is a lie.

Inside, meet five people with distinct insights into this heroin crisis: an addict, a cop, a mother, a bystander and a survivor.

Together they illuminate a plague that stretches from city streets to suburban funeral parlors, and that has proved hard to defeat. Consider one 33-year-old addict from Waukegan.

He must "spange" — a street term for begging or scamming — \$100 a day to feed his habit. A few weeks ago he got his girlfriend started on the drug. But with court looming for a probation violation, he said he was near the end.

"We made a pact," he said. "Our last day is today."

He paused to reconsider.

"Well, maybe tomorrow."



## The survivor

### Katie Bagdonas, Naperville

July 31, 2010

It takes a perverse brand of courage to be a heroin addict — a willingness to risk poverty, shame, incarceration, violence and death in pursuit of the rush. When Katie Bagdonas, 29, was ready to quit, she had to turn that bravery in a new direction.

She had abused drugs since her teen years in Glendale Heights, but when she first tried heroin at age 21, she was instantly smitten. Within two weeks she was using several times a day.

Bagdonas' first attempt at kicking the habit ended after a month. Her second lasted almost two years. But both times, she wasn't really committed to change. She quit the drug for the sake of a friend or her three children, but sooner or later, depression or boredom sent her back.

In March, after a drug spree sent her to a psychiatric ward, she girded herself to try again. This time, though, she was armed with a new insight:

"You really have to want to do it for yourself," she said. "You can't do it for other people."

She did 28 days at an inpatient center in Elgin, followed that up with a few months at the [Serenity House](#) treatment home in Addison, and then moved to a sober living house in Naperville.

She now works at a hardware store, but her true job is recovery — attending 12-step meetings, building relationships that aren't based on drugs and making amends to the many people hurt by her addiction. She's also learning to deal with the triggers and traps that seem to loom everywhere.

No one gets a parade for getting clean. But as Bagdonas is learning, the small rewards can be the most important.

"I'm OK with myself today, and I'm happy," she said. "That's the bottom line. I'm happy with the small things, being able to wake up each morning with a clear mind and know that I'm going to have a good day."



## The mom

### Sue VanDerHeyden, St. Charles

July 31, 2010

Sue VanDerHeyden was driving to work when the coroner's office called with the cause of her son's death. She braced herself, fearing that her darkest suspicion was about to be confirmed.

Andrew Klobertanz, 26, died in bed June 12 while chaperoning a sleepover with his young children in Batavia. His body was discovered by his 6-year-old son.

Klobertanz had led a troubled life since his early teens, VanDerHeyden said, treating his depression with alcohol and drugs and hanging out with equally reckless friends. He got into plenty of trouble, but he swore to his mother that he'd never mess with heroin. He'd already attended too many funerals of those who did.

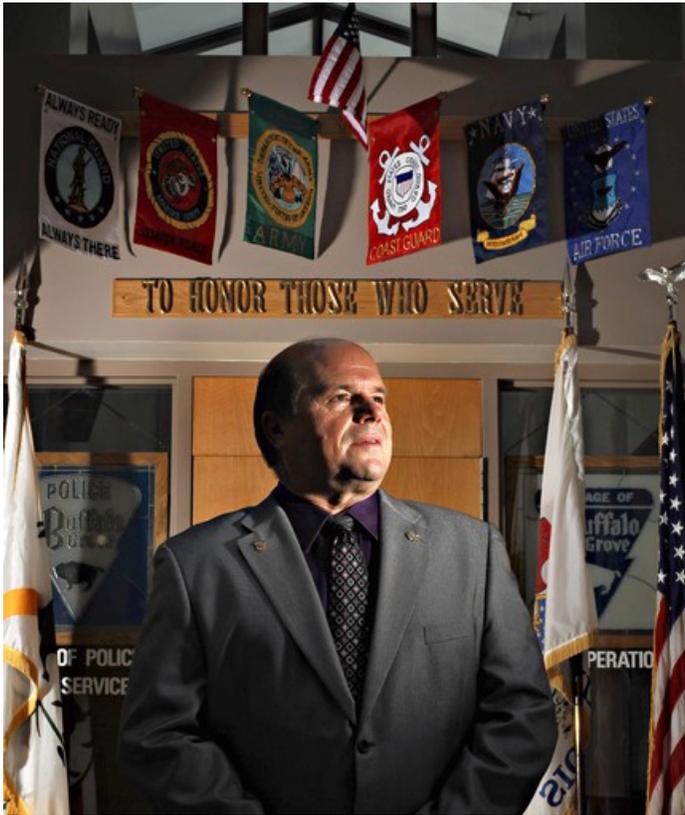
His mother wanted so badly to believe him. So when the coroner's office told her that heroin was indeed among the drugs that killed Klobertanz, her grief became even harder to bear.

"I thought he was cleaning up his act," she said. "Obviously he was hiding it from us and doing a pretty good job."

He was cremated wearing a T-shirt that bore the photographs and handprints of his children, and his ashes were placed in a silver urn that sits atop VanDerHeyden's stereo. She sometimes puts on his shoes and pads around her house, hoping to feel his presence.

Her grandchildren are getting counseling through a hospice organization, but she isn't sure she'll be able to afford long-term therapy for them. The 6-year-old wonders mournfully who will teach him new skateboard tricks.

VanDerHeyden, 48, has found support with [Hearts of Hope](#), a Geneva-based organization that aids parents of the addicted. She's trying to effect change in her own way, pressing her son's funeral program upon some of his friends. "Open this up and take a look at Andrew's name, because next time it could be your name in there," she tells them. "It's going to be your friends and family crying for you."



## The cop

### Police Chief Steve Balinski, Buffalo Grove

July 31, 2010

Heroin has lurked in the suburbs for a long time. What has changed in recent years is the willingness of young people to give it a try.

Many experts think that's because of the drug's greater purity, which allows novice users to get high by snorting it rather than relying on a needle. But Buffalo Grove Police Chief Steve Balinski suspects that suburban users are attracted primarily by its low price and easy availability in the city.

He noted, however, that the problems caused by the drug don't stay in Chicago. Some users try to make money by selling some of the heroin they bring back from the West Side. Others shoplift, burglarize homes or break into cars — problems that he said are on the rise in the northwest suburbs.

"It impacts the whole community, from different perspectives, with the most tragic event being the loss of someone's life," he said.

That has happened once in his village since 2009, along with six non-fatal overdoses. In Lake County as a whole, annual heroin-related deaths more than doubled over the last decade, from 13 to 30.

The alarming trend spurred Buffalo Grove police to join several public forums on heroin. Balinski said the most indelible impression came from a young man who described his descent into addiction. The man's clean-cut appearance, the chief said, appeared to shock the audience of suburban parents.

"We have a perception of a heroin addict as someone who looks homeless, with track marks all over his arms," he said. "He (looked like) just a good, wholesome kid."



# The bystander

## James Kimbrough, North Lawndale

July 31, 2010

Every morning, James Kimbrough walks around his 13-unit apartment building to pick up any garbage tossed on the property. He is sure to wear heavy work gloves, because it's likely the trash will include used syringes.

Kimbrough, 68, has nothing to do with the heroin business, but like many Chicagoans, he must live with the consequences. In his neighborhood, he and other residents say, hazardous litter is just the start.

Dealers take over playgrounds, forcing children to stay away. Customers, many of them clearly from the suburbs, weave their cars through the narrow streets after getting a fix. And some of Kimbrough's tenants get addicted and stop paying rent, forcing him to go through lengthy and expensive eviction proceedings.

"You wouldn't want to bring one of those drug-sniffing dogs around here," he said. "That dog would go crazy."

He is baffled by how the drug trade can be conducted so brazenly in his neighborhood, and by what he sees as the legal system's intolerable leniency. Judges who let dealers and buyers skirt jail, he said, should be forced to live on a street ruled by narcotics.

His neighbors share his frustration. At a recent meeting Kimbrough hosted at his building, they talked about addicts gathering so thickly outside one house that its owner had nowhere to park his car. They complained about the tiny baggies they find stamped with images — skulls and crossbones, cats, ducks — that denote the "brand" of heroin within.

Dorothy Williams, 52, said that a few weeks ago she saw a man plunge a needle into his forearm as he sat in his car, apparently unfazed by the thought that someone might be watching.

"You have that going on in broad daylight," she said. "It's as bad as I've seen it anytime, anywhere."



# The addict

## Jennifer Flynn, Aurora

July 31, 2010

When Jennifer Flynn spent time in the Cook County Jail recently for drug possession, she tried to persuade other young inmates to leave heroin alone.

But that conviction ended the moment she got out.

"Hitting the gate just made me want it," she said.

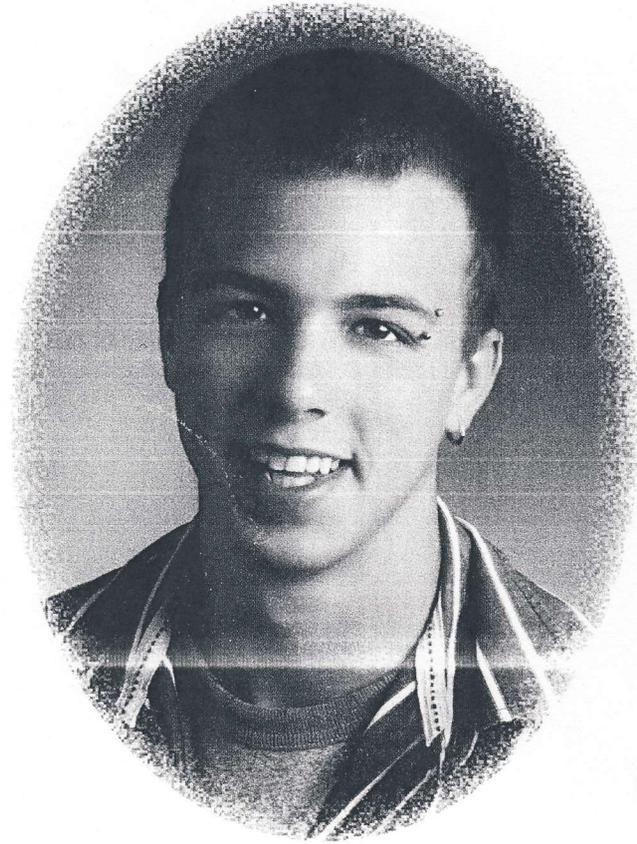
Flynn, 23, grew up in Aurora and said she was an A student, an athlete and a member of the marching band before she discovered heroin at age 18. It was a mind-blowing escape that caused her family problems to vanish — along with much that was going well in her life.

She started by snorting the drug, but within four months was using a needle. Her arms became dotted with track marks, a sight that clashed with her delicate face and librarian glasses.

She dropped out of high school and became well-versed in the West Side dope scene, staying wherever she could find a place to lie down, fearing nothing but the police. She rarely spared a thought for her future. Addiction meant living day to day, baggie to baggie.

No one told her about heroin's power when she took her first taste, she said, and she never would have tried it had she known. She had seen many people die of overdoses, including her best friend, she said. But even that hadn't been enough to put an end to her habit.

"I guess I'll stop when I'm sick and tired of it," she said. "I'm not sick and tired yet."



*Matthew Joseph Cadore, Jr.*

*Born into life on:*

*July 27, 1991*

*Born into eternity on:*

*July 7, 2010*



# HEALTHY LIVING

■ **To e-mail us:** The features section can be reached at [jfeatures@scn1.com](mailto:jfeatures@scn1.com)

Visit [www.heraldnews.com](http://www.heraldnews.com)

The Herald News

# Latest drug of choice

## Heroin deaths on rise

By **Brian Stanley**  
BSTANLEY@SCN1.COM

JOLIET — The number of heroin overdoses in Will County has risen tremendously this year.

“We’ve already surpassed last year. There’s been a much sharper increase,” Coroner Patrick K. O’Neil said.

There already have been 14 confirmed deaths from heroin in 2009 and two pending cases where the drug is also suspected.

Will County averaged approximately 13 heroin deaths annually from 2006 to 2008.

Eight of the overdoses this year occurred during the first two weeks of March, O’Neil said.

“Heroin is inexpensive and highly addictive. It’s taken over as the ‘drug of choice’ during the last two or three years,” he said.

O’Neil said the overdoses have occurred throughout the county.

Lt. Al Roechner said the Joliet Narcotics Unit has also seen “a big increase” in heroin activity.

“It’s been steady for the last couple years, but we have been able to buy more of it (during recent investigations),” he said.

**Comment on this story.**  
[www.heraldnews.com](http://www.heraldnews.com)



Amber, Dion Jr., Andrea and Amanda Thompson pose for a Christmas photo. Amber (far left) died of a heroin overdose in March.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

## Families share in grieving

By **Matt Hanley**  
MHANLEY@SCN1.COM

Joretta Hill never had any doubt she would make the phone call to the family that, like hers, had recently lost a child to a heroin overdose. She felt a need to reach out to them.

Kathleen and Dion Thompson were just starting to live Hill’s nightmare. They were grieving the death of their daughter, who also died of a heroin overdose.

And so eight months after her own daughter’s fatal heroin overdose, Hill contacted Thompson’s family to let them know they were not alone.

When all this started, neither family knew very much about heroin. The Thompsons had never heard of anyone dying from heroin. But then again they never knew — or at least they didn’t think they knew — anyone who used heroin.

So Hill had to tell the Thompsons they were not alone. She wanted to ask for the mother, to tell her that if she needed anything, she would try to help.

But Hill was nervous. And she had no idea what she was going to say. Hill called information, got the number for Amber Thompson’s parents and made the call.

The parents wanted to share the stories, believing it’s the only good thing that can come out of their daughters’ deaths: Perhaps someone else will read this and have second thoughts.

❖ Turn to **HEROIN, C5**

### INDICATORS OF HEROIN USE

Here are some symptoms or clues from the Heroin Awareness Foundation that are key indicators of possible heroin use.

HAF cautions that some signs are common to adolescent behavior and could be indicative of other problems like depression, not necessarily heroin use. If one or more

signs are noticed, HAF recommends a follow-up to identify the source of the problem.

- Unkempt appearance or hygiene issues
- Missing cash or valuables and stealing or borrowing money, or possession of unexplained valuables
- Change in performance, academic or otherwise

- Drug paraphernalia
- Apathy and/or lethargy
- Runny nose
- Lying or deception
- Change in friends
- Little or no motivation
- Incurring unusually large number of miles on car odometer

- Ignoring consequences of chosen behaviors
- Withdrawal from usual friends, activities or interests and loss of interest in usual, healthy activities
- Eyes appear “lost” or have far-away look
- Excess sleep
- Slurred speech

- No interest in future plans
- Broken commitments
- Hostility toward others
- Unexplained absences at work, school or family events
- Poor self-image
- Running away
- Difficulty in maintaining employment

# HEROIN

From page C1

## A beautiful life

Seymour and Joretta (Hill) Lawrence's daughter, Toni Lechuga, was born Dec. 2, 1972. By the time Toni was at Oswego High School, she was popular, a star volleyball player and plenty smart.

Her parents actually got called to school because Toni's ACT score was so high.

"We had a beautiful home," Hill said. "We had a beautiful family. We did all the things we thought we were supposed to do. We were just four people (including her husband's daughter), I assume going along as happy as can be. But sometimes that's not enough."

It was around Christmas 1988 when Toni, 16, first started to get a little sassy. At first, her mom attributed it to normal teenage mood swings.

But then the grades started to plunge. And her parents suspected she might have been experimenting with drugs.

On March 3, 1989, Hill took her daughter to rehab for the first time.

"When it started, it was fast," Hill said. "The first day that I found out my daughter was using heroin, I knew she was going to die."

## 'Didn't see it coming'

Amber Thompson had a lot of plans for the future. She was a teenager, so just one plan wouldn't do.

She was set to graduate from Minooka High School in May 2009. Then she'd join her older sister at Eastern Illinois University, where she would study psychology, or graphic arts, food, writing, or maybe teaching. The future was a fantastic blank slate.

At home, Amber was a good kid. She'd volunteer to scrub the beautiful hardwood floors that covered the first floor of her family's home just outside Joliet. She'd often pick up her little brother after school and take him to Chuck E. Cheese. Or she'd grab coffee — she called it "mud" — and bring it to her mom at the family business, where they'd spend the afternoon talking about all her plans.

What druggie does things like that?

"I feel like our daughter was taken out by a sniper out of a window," Amber's dad, Dion Thompson, said. "Didn't see it coming. We didn't have



SUBMITTED PHOTO

**Amber Thompson (left) poses with her sister Amanda. Amber died of a heroin overdose on March 22.**

an opportunity to fight for her."

## 'Maybe ... peer pressure'

So when was the first time that Toni Lechuga used heroin?

Over the course of her daughter's heroin addiction, Hill learned a lot of things that a mother shouldn't have to know. Toni never tried to hide anything. She talked about her sex life and her drug use.

But when she first used heroin isn't quite clear.

Hill says after Toni was married, she picked up heroin, or money to buy heroin, from her husband, Lionel Lechuga. But Hill doesn't think Lionel gave Toni her first drugs.

"Why she said yes, I don't know," Hill said. "Maybe it was peer pressure. Maybe it was that everyone else was doing it."

## 'Was she sniffing?'

So when was the first time that Amber Thompson used heroin?

At first, her parents were sure that it was the night she died. But later police told them she had used it at least once before. Dion and Kathleen Thompson were shocked.

If you had told them that Amber had tried alcohol or smoked cigarettes, they would have been disappointed, but they would have believed it.

And they had already dealt with the marijuana problem. Amber had spent an entire summer in the house after

that episode. But there was really no reason to suspect she was into anything more dangerous.

"Was she sniffing?" Kathleen Thompson said. "For someone who had allergies, yeah, but not for someone who is addicted to heroin. To know Amber, she just seemed smarter than that."

## 'It was insanity'

It wasn't long before Toni was a full-blown addict. Hill took her to rehab for the first of five times in January 1989. She is still paying bills from those visits.

Toni dropped out of high school. She overdosed for the first time on July 4, 1996. Hill went to the hospital.

"I knew when I was driving to the hospital she was going to die," Hill said. "Thank God she didn't. It was the beginning of the end."

Toni got married to Lionel and they had two children in between his stints in prison. While Lionel was in prison, Toni would live with Hill and could stay clean. She got her GED and started working as a respiratory therapist.

But when he got out, the trouble would start again.

Toni kept working, but would never accept more than contract work. She didn't want stay at one place, where they get to know her well enough to figure out she was an addict. Toni tried to be a good mother, but she knew she was failing. Her addiction

led her to prostitution, theft, more drugs.

"She always admitted she had a problem," Hill said. "She never tried to deny it. She didn't like who she was. She was embarrassed who she was."

In 1999, Toni crashed her car and broke both legs after she had a cocaine seizure while driving.

"It was out of control before," Hill said. "It was insanity after that."

Toni lost her job. She got her own apartment and the kids lived with Hill. And Toni kept using.

Even as she tried to get help for her daughter, Hill was very blunt and never hid what she thought. She would see glimpses of her cheerful young daughter, but they were fleeting. Toni would call every night to talk to her daughter and son.

In August 2008, Joretta stopped by the apartment. There was no food, so Hill bought a few groceries.

"I'm trying so hard to get straight," Toni told Hill. "If I stay straight for a whole weekend, can I see (my son)?"

Hill was going to a breast cancer fundraiser that weekend. She told Toni to call on Monday and they could arrange something.

On Monday, there was no call.

"I knew what no phone call meant," Hill said.

## 'She's still a good girl'

Amber was with a friend when she died.

Kyle Hayes, 20, was practically another child of the Thompsons. He was at the house all the time. He was in several of the pictures the family displayed at Amber's funeral. And the Thompsons almost bailed him out. That was before they heard the full story of what happened the night she died.

"He would do anything except call the paramedics," Dion Thompson said.

It was this past March 21, the second day of spring. Amber and Hayes went to a home in Aurora, where Ryan Faber, 25, and Christopher Parker, 22, lived. According to police, Faber sold heroin to Hayes. Parker loaded the heroin into a syringe and injected it into a willing Amber.

They continued to use heroin through the night. Amber struggled. At least two times the men had to do CPR on Amber to revive her. But when she recovered, they let her go to sleep.

The next day, on Sunday morning,

according to Aurora police, Amber wouldn't wake up. Hayes put her in his car, intending to take her to the hospital, police said. Instead, he stopped at a gas station and called 911, police said.

Paramedics found Amber barely breathing. She died at 11 a.m.

"Even if Amber was doing heroin, she still didn't deserve to die," Kathleen Thompson said. "She's still a good girl. She was 18."

Hayes, Parker and Faber all were charged with drug-induced homicide.

"Kids feel like they can't die," Dion Thompson said. "No one says, if you do heroin with someone and they die, you'll go to jail for 30 years."

## 'It's complicated'

On the weekend Toni was trying to stay clean so she could see her son, she met a man from Naperville. He drove Toni, then 36, to Chicago, where Hill says they bought cocaine and heroin.

The man provided the drugs and Toni provided sex.

On the following Tuesday, Toni took a mix of heroin and cocaine in his bathroom. Her heart stopped beating. She died eight days later, on Aug. 15, 2008.

Toni's husband was convicted in a federal racketeering conspiracy and faces a lengthy prison sentence. Hill is angry with him, but still holds Toni responsible for her own actions.

In Toni's obituary, Hill asked that donations be sent to the Oswego Police Department's drug prevention program. They got \$1,050, Hill said.

Hill has custody of Toni's kids. Her grandchildren are now 16 and 13. Hill doesn't hide what happened, but she can't explain everything.

"It's complicated to me and I'm an adult," she said. "This dominoes down to so many people."

## Sharing their grief

When Hill read in the paper that Amber Thompson had died of a heroin overdose, she knew she had to call.

She had never met them. She was a stranger. Of course, she knew they were grieving. So was she.

"I was hurting," Dion Thompson said. "I could hear in her that she was hurting."

Joretta Hill and Dion Thompson — strangers with too much in common — talked for two hours.

They cried and they shared and they tried to figure out why good daughters become victims of heroin.

# HEROIN ABUSE SURGING HERE

**STUDY | Area leads U.S. in ER treatment as suburban deaths soar**

BY MONIFA THOMAS

Staff Reporter/mjthomas@suntimes.com

More people in Chicago and its suburbs are admitted to hospital emergency rooms for heroin use than in any other major city, and heroin is now the most common illegal substance for which people in Illinois enter drug treatment, a new study shows.

In addition, heroin-related deaths have risen sharply in the collar counties, as use of the drug continues to expand among young, white suburbanites.

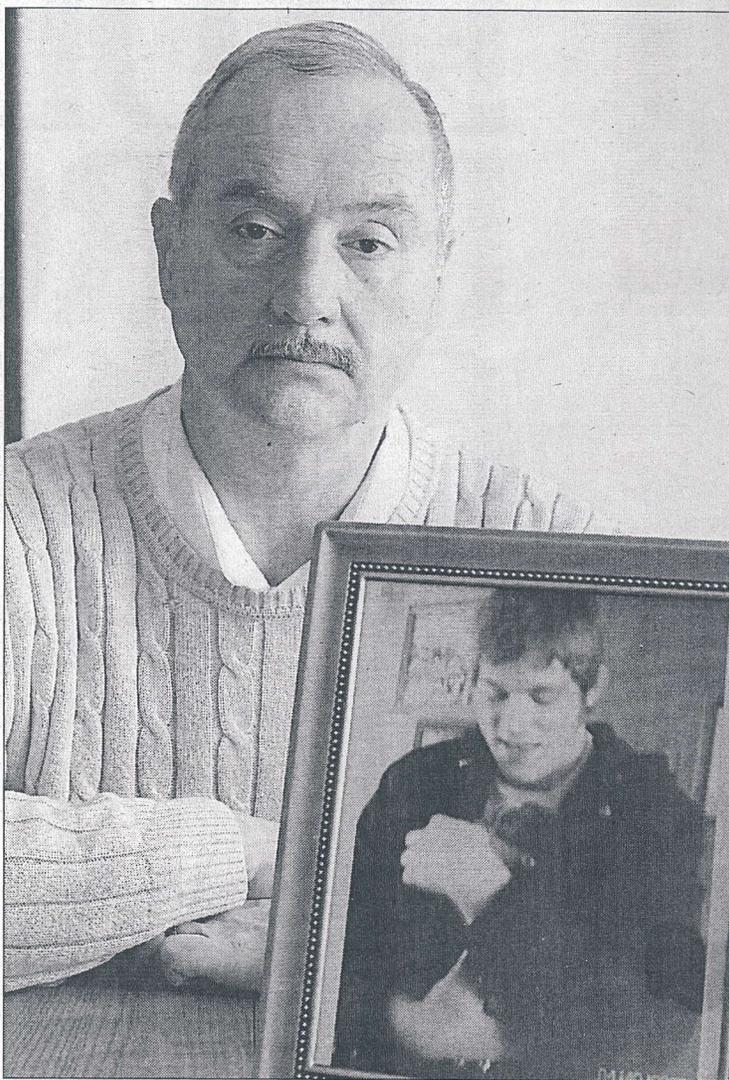
These are among the key findings from a report released today by Roosevelt University's Illinois Consortium on Drug Policy.

The report — which is based on federal and state data on admissions to hospitals and drug treatment programs, as well as county death records — illustrates that heroin is “the most significant illicit drug threat in the Chicago metropolitan area,” according to co-authors Stephanie Schmitz and Kathleen Kane-Willis.

In 2008, there were nearly 24,000 heroin-related hospital admissions in the Chicago area, more than in any of the 12 other cities included in the federal government's Drug Abuse Warning Network. New York and Boston had the next-highest totals.

“I get five or six heroin addicts per month in my treatment program,” said Dr. Jeffrey T. Johnson, medical director of the Behavioral Health Service of Central DuPage Hospital. “Alcohol is still the predominant drug, but with heroin, there's been a rise over the last five years or so.”

Johnson said one reason more people might be seeking treatment is greater availability of naloxone and buprenorphine, replacement



**Retired Chicago cop John Roberts lost his son Billy, 19, to a heroin overdose: “He thought he could control it. And you can’t.”** | JOHN PATSCH-HERALD-NEWS

drugs that minimize symptoms of withdrawal.

While heroin users in Chicago tend to be middle-age and black, suburban users are more likely to be under 25 and white, re-

searchers found. Young whites are also much more likely than blacks to inject heroin — a factor fueling a significant increase in injection drug use in Illinois over the last 10 years, Kane-Willis said.

In addition, deaths from heroin overdoses in McHenry and Lake counties have more than doubled in the last decade. Cook County, on the other hand, has seen a 16 percent decrease in heroin deaths since 2000, though deaths among white women have increased 40 percent.

Chicago's status as a transportation hub and the increasing purity of heroin from South America and Mexico make it a cheaply available drug, Kane-Willis said.

Particularly for suburban youth, heroin has become “trendy and exciting,” and Internet sites make it easier to find, she said.

John Roberts, a retired Chicago Police officer whose 19-year-old son Billy died of a heroin overdose last year, said many parents aren't aware of how available heroin is to their children.

“I know I wasn't,” said Roberts, who lives in Homer Glen. “Their kids can try heroin for \$10, and if they're lucky, they never try it again.”

But Billy Roberts did try heroin again, and he got hooked. After showing some progress in treatment, Billy died of an overdose in September.

“He found an inexpensive drug, and he thought he could control it. And you can't,” John Roberts said.

The report recommends putting a larger emphasis on heroin in drug education programs, increasing funding for substance abuse treatment and passing legislation to provide partial or full immunity to people who call 911 to report a drug overdose. Increasing the availability of syringes to injection drug users could also help prevent the spread of HIV and other infections, Kane-Willis said.

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## Son's death spurs 'war against heroin'

**I**lost the battle for my son's life, but my war against heroin is not over. My wife, my children and I are trying to help other families," said John Roberts, whose son Billy died from a heroin overdose last year.

A retired police officer, Roberts' passion for fighting the heroin epidemic in Will County has led him to advocate for education and change. He will speak March 30 at a community forum that focuses on "The New Face of Heroin Addiction: Illinois Teens."

Roberts wasn't always outspoken regarding his son's drug addiction. At one time the matter was a private, family issue. He's since changed his mind and is looking to change other people's minds, as well.

"We have to wake up and see what is happening right here in Will County. We need the same public attention for the heroin epidemic that the swine flu epidemic received."

### Compacency cited

His experience has shaped his views on drug addiction as a pervasive disease that attacks innocent people in different ways.

Roberts points out that the stigma attached to addiction and the prevalent



John Roberts with a picture of son Billy.  
JOHN PATSCH/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

compacency in society — demonstrated by remarks such as, "drugs have always been around" and "not my kid" — are barriers to changing pub-

lic attitudes.

"I was a police officer and taught criminal justice at a university, and so I didn't talk about what was happening in my own

family. I quietly sought help from family and close friends, and I just tried to keep Billy away from drugs.

"Billy was good boy; he just lost his way as he started his teen years," Roberts said.

"It started with kids at his high school passing Dramamine. Billy told us he was just trying to 'fit in' at school, and almost all of the kids he knew talked about finding ways to get high. Billy told us that is just the way it was and even commented that one friend said that is why they call it 'high' school."

Unfortunately, even though his family was very concerned, a year or two later, Billy was found with marijuana at school. With the zero tolerance mandate, he was expelled.

"We all hear No Child Left Behind, but what they don't tell you is where they are left and what they are left with. There should be no such thing as a throwaway kid, but that's what we're doing in our society. No one says, 'Let's find you help. You're on your own.'"

### First overdose

Roberts recalls the first time his son overdosed and the trip to the hospital: "They did their job and brought him out of it."

The medical staff suggested the family find a program and noted that the hospital's program was small and maybe not the best.

Roberts and his wife searched through phone books, looking for resources. Their health insurance would not cover in-patient care, a trend Roberts has found with a number of carriers. "You'd think that they would want to catch it early," he noted.

The couple began with intensive, outpatient counseling and felt fortunate that Billy was responding and working well with both counselor and family. They were hopeful.

That is until September 2009, when Billy overdosed on heroin, most likely part of a potent batch of the drug from Afghanistan that had been distributed in the Chicago area. The 19-year-old became a statistic: he was one of 217 heroin-related deaths in the six-county area.

"If I had it to do all over again, I'd do it differently," Roberts said.

### Advocacy aim

Through the loss and pain, he has learned and wants to advocate for a different way of doing things. "Are we doing the

right thing or the same old tired thing. What can we do differently to save our kids?"

Roberts said everyone who can help a heroin addict works in their own sphere of influence to do their job: the courts, emergency services, law enforcement, hospitals, schools, treatment providers and businesses. And that, he added, needs to change.

"There is a need for working together. And there is a need for everyone in the community to know," he said.

Roberts wants parents to know that it is easier to get heroin than beer, and that heroin is cheaper than prescription drugs. "They need to know that a kid can get a hit of heroin for \$5 to \$10," he said.

"From my own experience of wanting to keep things private and not wanting a criminal record for my son, I have had a shift of feelings. The best thing that could have happened was to get him arrested and moved into the right circle of help.

"We have to make sure that there is a circle that is connected and ready to help all of our kids. I believe you can never give up."

— Story courtesy of Stepping Stones



DWIGHT POLICE CHIEF Tim Henson emphasizes a point during the August 26 meeting on the drug problem in Dwight. Livingston County officials behind him are, from left to right: Chief Deputy Ken White, Pontiac Police Major Jim Wolford, Sheriff Bob McCarty, Pontiac Police Chief Dale Newsome, Asst. States Attorney Scott Terry, and States Attorney Tom Brown. Also in attendance were Coroner Mike Burke, Chief Judge Jennifer Bauknecht, and Fairbury Police Chief Jack Wiser.

## Drug Dog Wanted Heroin Bedevils Dwight

by Tom Tock

### Syringes.

Syringes in Renfrew Park under the benches . . . in the walkway alongside the Bank of Dwight . . . syringes along Pinecone Path . . . on the East Delaware St. bridge . . . in the bushes recently removed near the railroad depot . . . syringes on the East Main St. sidewalk . . .

### Syringes for injecting heroin.

"We are losing the battle" against heroin, said Dwight Chief of Police Tim Henson at a 6:30 p.m. meeting August 26 that he called in St. Patrick's parish hall.

Circuit Judge Jennifer Bauknecht stated, "Heroin is the biggest problem we have right now . . . drug use and the crime associated with it is the worst problem we have in Livingston County."

Bauknecht went on, "It's good to see that Dwight has recognized the problem. We see the problem every day in my courtroom."

Mike Burke stated, "In my nineteen years as coroner, Dwight still holds the title for the most lethal dose of a drug ingested by a

human being." The victim's body contained enough drugs to kill several other people, Burke said.

Norcán (a heroin antidote) saves a lot of people who become overdosed, according to Burke, so he doesn't know how many drug deaths there would be otherwise.

"There were 100 residents in Dwight on the known (drugs) user/seller list," said Henson, "but right now we're down to 98 because two of them have died."

This, and other testimony about drug use, especially heroin drug use, in Dwight was graphically portrayed to the 90 people who attended the August 26 meeting.

Heroin is regularly being brought into the community from Chicago and suburbs. Interstate 55 serves as the pipeline. Elaborate measures are sometimes taken to hide the heroin.

The majority of users are ages 12 to 26, but senior citizens are not exempt.

The addiction to heroin can be immediate, it is a powerful drug. Users that are rescued from the brink of death are oftentimes anxious to

shoot up again.

### How can such drug use be controlled?

Two of the guests at the August 26 meeting were Fairbury policeman Rob McCormick and his drug dog *Gunnar*.

*Gunnar* gave an enthusiastic display of his ability to sniff out a can containing cocaine and another containing marijuana in a demonstration before the eyes of a highly attentive audience.

A drug dog like *Gunnar* is the tool that Henson said Dwight needs to fight the drug abuse prevalent in the community. Drug dogs have been successful in controlling heroin and other drug use in not only Fairbury and Pontiac, but across the country. Police forces in most major cities now use police dogs to sniff out illegal drugs, search buildings, track lost people and criminals, and protect their handlers.

Chief Henson told those assembled that the immediate need is to raise \$60,000 for a drug dog, training, a K-9 police car, and the equip-

ment necessary to support a quality drug dog program.

He has received permission from the village to seek private financing for the endeavor.

As of Monday, the program had received \$24,000 in pledges. One pledge was for \$5,000.

"I don't want to knock on any more doors and tell people that their loved one is no longer with us," said Henson. "We need everyone to help solve this problem."

An initial committee of six was formed to work for the establishment of the K9 unit. Members are Sharon Doyle, Justin Eggenberger, Larry Little, Phil Becker, Rodney Connor and Lou Cronin.

Checks may be made payable to *Community Foundation of Grundy County*; memo: *Impact Dwight, Drug Dog*.

The checks should be delivered to Chief Henson at the Dwight Public Services Complex, 209 S. Prairie Ave.

# HEROIN'S TOLL HITS HOME IN SOUTHLAND

Drug rings, rising adolescent use, overdoses give authorities all they can handle

BY JOHN K. RYAN AND  
SUSAN DEMAR LAFFERTY  
jryan@southtownstar.com

**D**uring her long and fierce battle with heroin addiction, Melissa Edwards sometimes went years with nowhere to sleep but her car.

She would spend her days stealing to pay for her habit. Her body would deteriorate to the point where the figure she saw in the mirror appeared to be dead.

But one problem Edwards didn't have was obtaining the heroin. Scoring it on the streets, including in the Southland, is as easy as getting marijuana, said Edwards, who lives in Orland Park.

Last week's bust of two major heroin rings operating in Robbins and Harvey bear her out. Police said a dead-end block in Robbins was akin to a drive-through drugstore where users could buy \$10 bags and did so often enough that dealers could sell as much as \$3,000 worth of heroin in a single day. An FBI task force charged 16 people, 13 from the Southland, with selling or possessing heroin.

But heroin use isn't just a cops and criminals problem. Police are particularly alarmed about the growing rate of heroin use among adolescents, and officials at local drug treatment centers say the number of teens showing up hooked on heroin is growing.

In Will County, 30 people died of heroin



**On the right path:** Recovering heroin addict Melissa Edwards begins to smile while reflecting Monday on the circumstances that finally have given her a job and hope for the future at the Furniture Thrift Warehouse at 9622 W. 143rd Street in Orland Park. | JOSEPH P. MEIER-SUN-TIMES MEDIA

overdoses in 2009 alone, according to Coroner Patrick O'Neil, and he expects the final 2010 numbers to be similar.

Former Chicago policeman John Roberts, of Homer Glen, who lost his son to heroin addiction, calls the problem an epidemic and helped form an organization that hopes to reduce the number of heroin-related deaths. But state-supported treatment centers on the front line are losing funding, and the budget plan Gov. Pat Quinn laid out Wednesday isn't going to help, according to Sara Moscato Howe, the chief executive officer of Illinois Alcoholism and Drug Dependency Association, an advocacy group for treatment centers.

### The plunge into addiction

When Edwards, 29, smoked her first joint at age 13, it was for the fun of it. She had been a self-described "A" and "B" student

and "good kid who came from a fairly normal household." She didn't imagine a life of living out of her car, crashing at drug houses in the projects and doing time at Cook County Jail.

But Edwards and her friends started smoking crack, then moved on to heroin, changing her pastime into a full-time pursuit.

"My life and my friends' lives were focused on getting high," Edwards said.

Her descent into heavy drug use took a major leap into darkness on Nov. 23, 1998. Edwards was driving four others into the city to score some weed. Near 131st Street on the Bishop Ford Freeway, another

vehicle cut her off. Her car flipped 11 times. Edwards, then 16, wasn't wearing a seat belt. She was ejected from the car and landed on a garbage dump, severing her spine and paralyzing her below the waist.

"My boyfriend, Brian, found me, and I told him to bend my legs. He said they already were bent and I went into shock. It freaked me out," she said.

When she left the hospital in a wheelchair three months later, Edwards went looking for an escape from her reality. She got some heroin from a friend.

"It wasn't hard to find even then," she said. "It was at my high school (Lake Central High School in St. John, Ind.). I used to

bring it to school."

She was scared to try it the first time, but for the next several years wasn't hesitant about smoking, sniffing or injecting it.

"I fell in love with it right away. It was a true escape from reality, and I was trying to escape," she said. "Part of it was escaping the fact I could not walk again, but I could not emotionally handle life in general."

Soon, she was doing 10 to 15 \$10 bags a day. She and her boyfriend, Brian Edwards, now her husband, would steal every day to support the habit. Razor blades and DVDs that could be resold at flea markets and music shops were popular targets.

**"You can't do this drug recreationally," she said. "It will grab you and pull you down as far as you can go. I hit rock bottom so hard that the only way to look was up."**

MELISSA EDWARDS, recovering heroin addict

**“We’d hang, but we’d all rip each other off in a minute for the drugs.”**

MELISSA EDWARDS,  
recovering heroin addict



**A life lost:** Retired Chicago Police officer John Roberts, of Homer Glen, talks about his son Billy, who died from a heroin overdose in September 2009 at age 19. | BRETT ROSEMAN - SUN-TIMES MEDIA

**The new-look addicts**

Heroin users aren’t all pale, emaciated figures with red-rimmed eyes and needle marks up and down their arms, and all junkies don’t hide in alleys. They could be the kid next door, like Edwards was, spending part of a day snorting or sniffing dime bags of heroin — at least until they become full-blown addicts.

That’s according to those who run local drug rehabilitation centers and see more and more teens coming for help for heroin use.

“It’s more glamorous today. It’s fashionable,” said Allen Sandusky, president and chief executive officer of the South Suburban Council on Alcohol and Substance Abuse in Hazel Crest.

“They come from middle-class homes,” said Judy Emerson, a spokeswoman for Rosecrance treatment centers, which has a location in Frankfort. “They use it as easily as marijuana now. Using heroin doesn’t feel as freaky scary as it once did to them.”

Emerson was referring to heroin no longer having to be injected with a needle because it’s more pure. Users smoke or snort it until their tolerance builds to the point where they have to inject it to get the same rush. Sometimes, their tolerance gets so high they have to inject it just to avoid withdrawal symptoms, said Dr. Joseph Beck, medical director of the Illinois Institute of Addiction Recovery at Ingalls Memorial Hospital in Harvey.

Long before that stage, users see heroin as a cheap buzz. For between \$5 and \$10, a user can stay high for about four hours.

The fallout: Using opiates, including heroin, was behind only marijuana and alcohol as a reason adolescents 12 to 18 checked into Rosecrance facilities in 2009. The number checking in for that reason in 2001 was negligible, officials said.

“The old protocol used to be moving from cigarettes to alcohol to marijuana to hard drugs,” said Dave Sutor, the substance abuse counselor at Rosecrance’s Frankfort location. “Now they go to harder drugs much quicker.”

**Deadly consequences, and no safe zone**

Roberts, the retired Chicago cop, saw enough misery caused by drug addiction during his 33 years on the force that he wanted to move his family to the “safer suburbs to live the American Dream” shortly after he retired six years

**DRUGS OF CHOICE**

The top three substances for which Rosecrance treatment centers have provided treatment services for in selected years (heroin is an opiate):

**Adults**

**2001:** Alcohol (37 percent), cocaine (23), marijuana (20)

**2005:** Alcohol (32 percent), cocaine (24), opiates and marijuana (19 each)

**2009:** Alcohol and opiates (38 percent each), cocaine (13)

**Adolescents (12 to 18)**

**2001:** Marijuana (34 percent), alcohol (27), nicotine (18)

**2005:** Marijuana (32 percent), alcohol (25), nicotine (23)

**2009:** Marijuana (70 percent), alcohol (16), opiates (10)

Source: Rosecrance Treatment Centers

**Signs of heroin use**

- Deteriorating appearance, weight loss
- Red-rimmed eyes and runny nose, without a cold or allergies
- Slowed motor skills, cloudy thinking
- Changed eating and sleeping patterns
- Hanging out with a new friends
- Deteriorating relationships with family members
- Missing money, valuables and prescriptions

Source: Illinois Alcoholism and Drug Dependence Association

ago, he said.

They chose Homer Glen but found out that nowhere is safe from the heroin market. John’s youngest son, Billy, began doing the drug in high school and went back to it after going through treatment.

Spending money on heroin was one reason he didn’t go with some friends to a White Sox game on Sept. 29, 2009. He stayed instead at a friend’s house on the Southwest Side, took heroin,

“I’d do most of the stealing. They’d never suspect someone in a wheelchair. I’d hide the items under my seat,” she said.

They stole from friends, even one who was overdosing at the time.

“When you’re getting high, you find buddies to hang with who are also getting high,” she said. “We’d hang, but we’d all rip each other off in a minute for the drugs.”

Eventually, she and Brian got caught and spent time in jail, an especially tough situation for junkies.

“The guards would heap abuse on anyone going through withdrawals,” Edwards said.

She and Brian mostly lived out of their car but sometimes stayed with his grandmother. Edwards said they’d feed their habit every day “until the birds started chirping,” then sleep until noon. Food was no longer desirable, and bathing was not frequent.

“I was like down to 90 pounds,” said Edwards, who also developed hepatitis from dirty needles. “I remember looking in the mirror, which you don’t do much when you’re doing heroin, and my cheeks were sunken way in. It scared the crap out of me. It looked like I was dead.”

The couple had two boys, now 5 and 9, during their seven years of living that lifestyle. Edwards’ mother, and later her uncle and aunt, took care of the boys. She was in and out of rehab centers eight times during those years.

“I hadn’t reached rock bottom yet,” she said.

That finally happened when she found herself on Michigan Avenue in the Loop, in her wheelchair with a sign reading, “I am homeless. Please help.”

“People would look at me horrible. They’d look at me like I was scum, which I felt like,” she said.

That and dreams of being with her children finally got her clean in 2006, though the pull never leaves completely. Edwards said she has had two relapses, including a two-day binge in October, since getting clean.

“You can’t do this drug recreationally,” she said. “It will grab you and pull you down as far as you can go. I hit rock bottom so hard that the only way to look was up.”

drifted off to sleep and stopped breathing.

"We don't know why some kids are attracted to it rather than scared of it," Roberts said. "Is it that they don't need needles anymore because it's so pure? ... It's becoming so common.

"(Billy's death) has scarred us and the friends who found him," Roberts said. "This drug destroys family and friends."

The numbers tell that story: There were 68 drug overdose deaths in Will County in 2009, 30 of them attributed to heroin, according to O'Neil, the coroner.

"It certainly is the drug of choice," he said.

So far this year, there have already been four confirmed deaths from heroin overdose and O'Neil suspects four more.

"(Heroin) does not have a home; it's all over the map," he said. "It's a huge problem."

Beck said the drug usually kills by working on the brain's respiratory center to slow breathing to a point where not enough oxygen is being taken in. The effect is sudden. O'Neil recounted seeing victims with a straw still in their nose or a needle still in their vein.

"Death is so quick, there is no chance to reach out for assistance," he said.

### Fighting the problem

The biological and behavioral changes caused by doing heroin for a long period of time make heroin harder to kick than other addictive substances, experts say.

"It's deep in the brain, underneath our ability to think rationally," Beck said of heroin's pull. "I can detox anyone, but I can only keep clean about 20 percent of those in rehab for heroin."

In the first week of going through withdrawal, patients can experience vomiting, diarrhea, insomnia, cold flashes and pain.

Recovery for some addicts depends on the help offered by treatment centers. Some involved in running such centers in Illinois worry deeply about how the budget proposed Wednesday by Quinn will adversely effect those seeking treatment.

Sara Moscato Howe, chief executive officer of Illinois Alcoholism and Drug Dependence Association, said the proposed budget would eliminate \$53 million, or 26 percent, from the Division of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse, reducing the number of people who can receive treatment next year by 18,928, including 9,842 in Cook County.

"Crime rates, domestic violence incidents and traffic accidents will explode across Illinois," Howe said in a news release. "Governor Quinn will have to answer for the consequences."

On another front, Roberts has helped form HERO (Heroin Epidemic Relief Organization) to combat the number of deaths from heroin overdose. He is pushing for police to give immunity to those who call 911 to report an overdose, even if the caller is using the drug.

"At least for users who have just small amounts," Roberts said. "It's an unconventional approach, but we have to rethink how to approach this epidemic. Police may lose a charge for a small amount of heroin, but it could save lives."

HERO will hold a rally at 9 a.m. April 30 at St. Bernard's Church and then on an outlot near 143rd Street and Bell Road in Homer Glen.

"We hope it lets people realize there is something they can do to save somebody," Roberts said. "Stand up against the drugs. If we don't, I fear the number of deaths will grow. It's growing now epidemically."

# Heroin exacting a toll

BY SUSAN FRICK CARLMAN  
scarlman@stmedianetwork.com

This is not your parents' heroin. After gaining notoriety in the "psychedelic '60s" before taking a back seat to cocaine, Ecstasy and other recreational drugs, abuse of the killer narcotic has resurged in recent years.

Today heroin maintains a chokehold on many of those who abuse illegal substances, particularly young residents of Chicago's suburbs. And it is deadlier than ever.

A recent Roosevelt University study found heroin use among teens in Chicago's collar counties went up 46 percent between 2008 and 2009.

The number of Illinois residents who checked in to publicly funded programs for treatment of addiction to the drug more than quadrupled from 1998 to 2008, reaching 17,411 at the end of the decade.

Coroners' records show that in DuPage and Will counties, 235 people died from heroin overdoses between 2005 and 2010. Three times in as many weeks last month, Naperville police arrested suspected heroin traffickers in the city.

Addictions specialists at Linden Oaks Hospital at Edward are keenly aware of the narcotic's grip on many young people. According to Beth Sack, the Naperville facility's manager of addiction services, most patients age 18 to 25 are abusing opiates, either pharmaceuticals or heroin.

For one Naperville mother, the roller-coaster ride of addiction has brought much heartache.

Her son, who has had multiple arrests for heroin possession, was hours away from entering a local inpatient treatment program when her ex-husband picked him up from her house and gave him refuge.

"I was furious at both of them ... I told my (now 21-year-old) son that I would no longer pay his phone bill or bail him out of jail," the woman wrote in an e-mail to Sun-Times Media. "When he was ready to have a relationship with me and my family (who live just six miles away), we would be available, with open arms. He hasn't talked to me since, and changed his cell phone (my only means of contact)."

Sack said the possibility of accidentally administering a lethal dose has little deterrent effect on most heroin users.

"It's kind of interesting with these young adults," she said. "It really doesn't faze them."

Sgt. John McAnally of the Naperville Police Department said the it-can't-happen-to-me mind-set keeps the object lessons from hitting home.

"They think, 'They don't know what they're doing, but I do,'" he said.

## Tenacious menace

Sack and McAnally agree heroin has maintained a strong and steady presence over the past several years, posing a substantial concern for public health, safety and law enforcement.

"I'd say it's the same. We just made some headway in some of our investigations" in March, McAnally said, adding that the department still has an unspecified number of

cases yet to yield arrests. "It's a problem all over Illinois, quite frankly."

Part of the danger is the drug's potency. Heroin now is far purer than it was a couple of decades ago, when addicts would "cook" the drug in spoons to burn off the impurities before injecting it.

"Now it's a purer level, so they can use it by snorting it," McAnally said.

If the user is accustomed to something that's 40 percent or 50 percent pure and then buys a product that is not so deeply cut, coming in closer to 80 percent pure, it's impossible to know the dosage should be adjusted, and the risk of overdose is high.

"There's no quality control on who's stepping on it, how pure it is," McAnally said.

The option of inhaling the drug also draws a lot of users who wouldn't consider sticking a needle in their arm — but that delivers a quicker and more intense high.

"A lot of times in people's minds, when people start to use, they're like, 'Oh, it's OK. I'm not using a needle,'" Sack said. "I think when they do, it's really, 'Wow, I've moved on to that now.'"

And when they do, the physical dependency is generally much advanced.

"They're not using it to get high anymore," McAnally said. "They're using it to not feel bad."

## Supply and demand

The market landscape also has changed in the past few years.

Users used to drive into the city to pick up their supply, but now the demand is sufficient to entice sellers to bring their wares out here, usually from Chicago, "based on the money," McAnally said.

And while dealers not long ago would often give away the first taste, confident that the intensity of the high would bring patrons back with their wallets in hand, they no longer find that necessary. The market is plenty strong now.

"The guys coming out here are actually charging more, like a tax," McAnally said.

Another contributing factor is the drug's relatively low cost. When people have developed a habit of abusing prescription opiates such as Oxycontin and Vicodin, they find it easy to move on to heroin.

"That's what we'll hear," Sack said. "They'll say, 'I was using pills, but then I couldn't get them, and heroin is cheaper, so I started doing that.'"

A gram sells for about \$200, but users most frequently buy small foil packages containing a hit, enough for one high. Those go for \$10.

"It's not like it's a hundred bucks, but a lot of these kids will use four or five of those in a day," McAnally said.

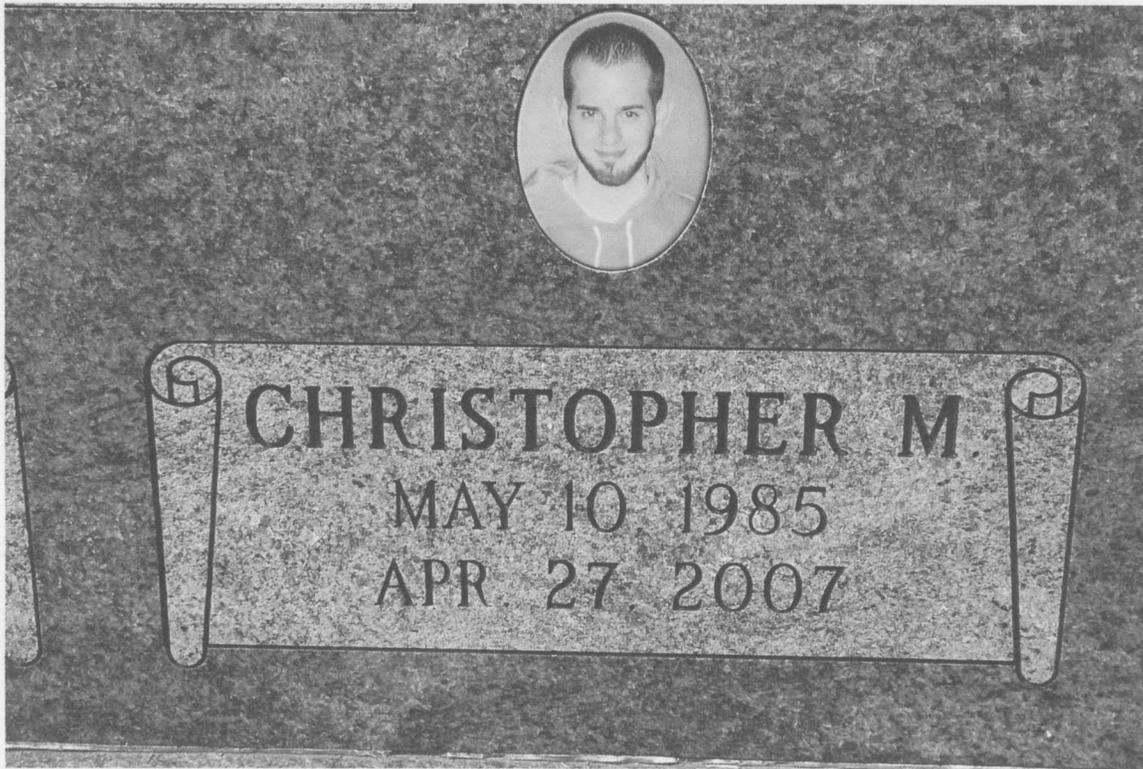
As police continue the local drug war, he said parents can take steps that may help keep their teens safe.

"Like any kind of drug or alcohol abuse, you really have to monitor where they're going, what they're doing, who they're with," he said. "We've known about that for 40 years."

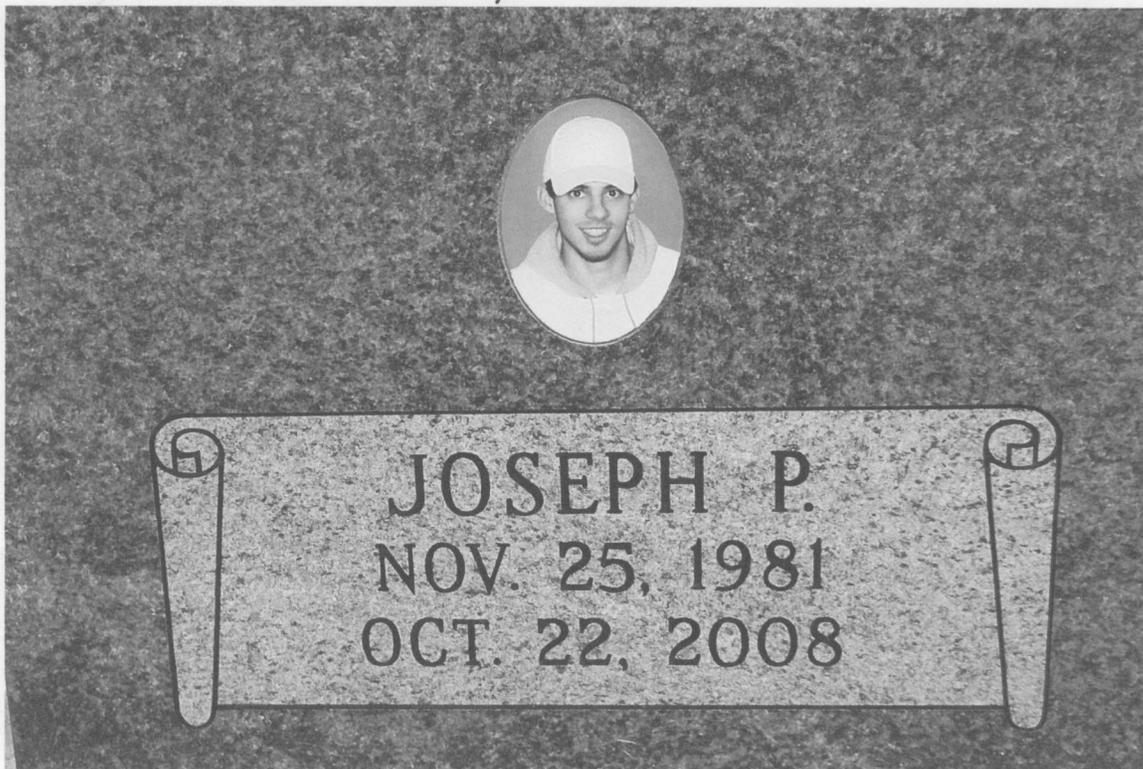
He acknowledged that it's unlikely the intense vigilance will be welcomed. The backlash could be fierce and hurtful.

"But going to their funeral is a lot worse."

LILJA



21 yrs. old



26 yrs. old

# Afghanistan's heroin pipeline

By **MAX RUST** AND **PHIL GEIB**

Amid 10 years of war, Afghanistan has become the world's primary supplier of opium poppy, the plant used to make heroin.

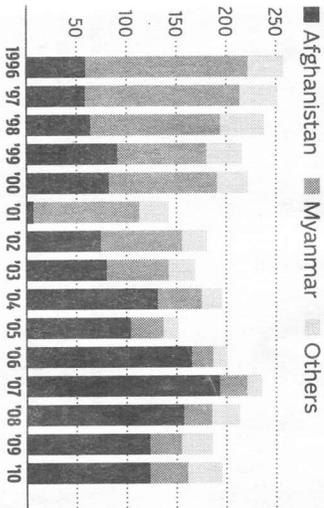
The nation's leading cash crop is responsible for billions of dollars in societal costs there and elsewhere, affecting areas such as health care and law enforcement.

## The supply

Providing nearly 90 percent of the world's poppy crop, Afghanistan is by far the largest source of opium and heroin. An overall rise in poppy cultivation since the 1990s can be attributed in some part to the U.S.-led invasion of the country in 2001 and the removal of the Taliban regime, which, in 2000, placed a ban on growing the plants. Although cultivation levels nationwide are nearly the same as in 2005, a look at regional production reveals a slight geographic shift from north to south.

### Cultivation of opium poppy

Scale in thousands of hectares (one hectare equals 2.5 acres)



## The demand

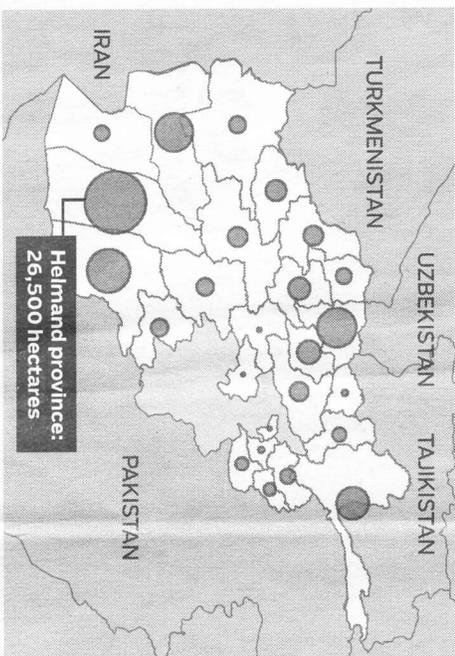
Heroin and opium depart Afghanistan for their destined markets through three major gateways. From these areas, the drugs are smuggled to countries around the world via land and, increasingly, by plane and ship. Along the way, the drugs pass through some of the world's highest per capita opiate-consuming nations.

### Pakistan

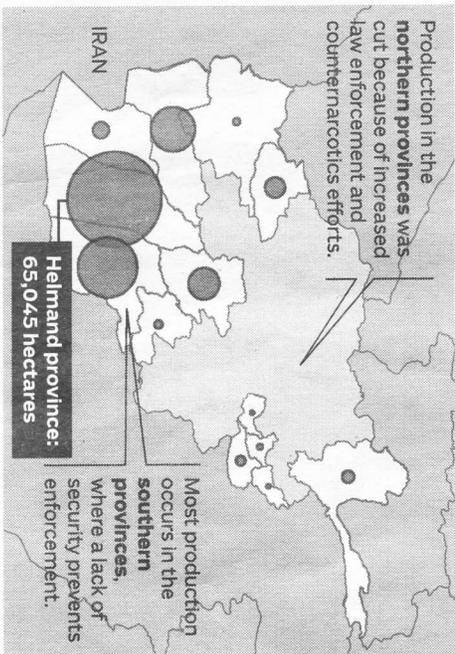
Most heroin enters from Afghanistan's Kandahar and Helmand provinces, where a lack of law enforcement and a relatively strong Taliban presence facilitate smuggling. The bulk is moved through Lahore, Karachi and other coastal cities, where it is forwarded to Europe, Southeast Asia and, increasingly, Africa, where relatively weak law enforcement is advantageous to smugglers.



### Afghanistan poppy cultivation by province in 2005 ...



### ... and in 2010



### World heroin production, 2009 In tons

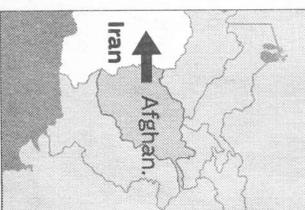
The primary end product of poppy production is heroin, of which Afghanistan is by far the world's leading provider.



NOTE: One other minor producer, Colombia, is not included in the chart.

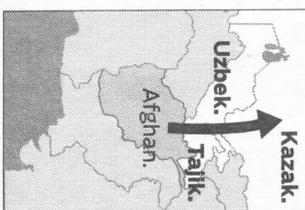
### Iran

Heroin enters mainly from the Afghan border but also from Pakistan. The drug is then moved to the coast, through Iraq, across primarily through Turkey and on to Europe through a channel known as the "Balkan Route." Lax visa requirements along the way make this a favored route among traffickers.



### Kazak.

Heroin flows across Afghanistan's porous northern border into Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, then ultimately to Kazakhstan. In 2009, 83 percent of the heroin entering Afghanistan's northern neighbor countries was trafficked onward to Russia, where the majority of it was consumed. The rest was trafficked onward to Eastern Europe.



### "Northern Route"