



**CenturyCollege**

## ***News Release***

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## **Century College Grieves with Chris Caulkins after Second Tragedy**

Since his wife died by suicide in 2003, Century College acting associate dean Chris Caulkins has been on a mission to raise awareness that depression is treatable and suicide is preventable.

He helped start a mental health initiative at Century, founded a suicide survivors' support group in Woodbury, presented training sessions for police officers and fire fighters, frequently speaks to groups and is connected with SAVE (Suicide Awareness Voices of Education.)

Caulkins' Student Success Day presentations on depression and suicide have been some of the best-attended sessions on campus. People regularly contact him to talk informally about these issues.

And then, on Oct. 15, the unthinkable happened. Caulkins' quick-witted, kind, fun-loving, life-of-the-party younger brother, Jeremy, 27, shot and killed himself in his Hastings home. He left no note.

“It was surrealistic,” said Caulkins, a trained paramedic and Woodbury fire fighter. “I still can't believe I have been impacted by this twice. It seems unreal. Losing a sibling is just as bad as losing a spouse, but it is different. It feels just as awful, but it is different. When your spouse dies, it is the loss of a dream and a life together. When your sibling dies, you have lost companionship and friendship.”

Caulkins now knows that despite Jeremy's assurances that his depression was under control, he was in desperate pain, and had been for years. His journals, found after his death, document his daily struggle with deep anxiety, fear and a dreadful feeling that he was falling far short of the man he wanted to be. Jeremy worked as the executive chef at the Hastings Country Club and was a law enforcement student at Century College.

Jeremy's untimely death has deepened Caulkins' determination to raise people's awareness about depression and suicide. "I am going to drag the ugly monster out from under the bed," said Caulkins, who has a master's degree in public health. "I am not going to give this stigma power."

After Jeremy's death, Caulkins sent everyone at Century an email informing them of the tragedy and encouraging them to think of ways to incorporate mental health topics into their courses. "We can let this disease beat us or we can fight back," wrote Caulkins. "Please join me in the latter." He also gave them links to two YouTube memorials he created that incorporate the latest statistics on depression and suicide. The addresses are [www.youtube.com/watch?v=w12n5nplHyg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w12n5nplHyg) and [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Svhp2oWAOrl&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Svhp2oWAOrl&feature=related).

Caulkins received an overwhelming response from Century employees at all levels who talked about how suicide had impacted their lives, too. "It is time to be more open about this pervasive problem," said Caulkins.

"Major depression is like getting hit on the head with a hammer every five minutes. All you can think about is the next blow. At what point would you take your own life to stop the pain?"

Because depression is caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain, Caulkins said people have to stop feeling shame and humiliation about the disease and start treating it just as they would treat any chronic illness.

After his wife died, Caulkins started paying for each of his six siblings to go on annual vacations with him. Last March was Jeremy's turn, and the two brothers traveled to South Carolina and "blitzed the state." Caulkins is deeply grateful they had that time together.

"Find out what makes you happy and take care of yourself," advised Caulkins. "See a doctor if you have signs of depression. And above all, tell someone that you love them."



Photo: Jeremy Caulkins