



Rural Minds to Bring Message to PA State Grange Session

Personal Tragedy Leads to National Discussion Regarding Mental Health

There's a mental health emergency in rural America: People living in rural communities have much higher rates of depression and suicide than people living in urban areas. Though hidden away in the shadow for years, if not generations, this challenge is finally being brought into the light, and has led to public discourse about the unspoken impact of mental health issues.

The **National Grange** is partnering with **Rural Minds** – a nonprofit organization confronting the mental health challenges faced by rural Americans – to develop a Rural Suicide Awareness and Prevention program. The goal for this educational program is to create a grassroots, person-to-person approach that provides people who live in rural communities with mental health and suicide prevention information.

Personal Tragedy Initiates Call to Action

Jeff Winton was raised on his family's dairy farm in rural upstate New York. Growing up, he discovered that many of the families in his small, 500-person town had a relative or friend living with some form of untreated mental illness—depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety, schizophrenia. But their struggle was met with silence. There were few or no resources in the community for treating them or conversations about helping them. The stigma attached to mental illness was palpable.

In 2012, the suicide of his beloved 28-year-old nephew was a wake-up call for Jeff. In the eulogy he delivered, Jeff shared his family's continuing struggle with mental illness. After the service, many local families shared their own experiences and thanked Jeff for finally giving them the permission to talk openly and freely. He realized that so much more needed to be done.

Since then, Jeff has focused a majority of his professional career aligning his expertise in the biopharmaceutical industry with his passion for helping rural families. He founded *Rural Minds*, a nonprofit organization to serve as the informed voice for mental health in rural America, and to provide mental health information and resources. Winton believes raising awareness liberates people living in the shadow of stigma to not only seek help, but also to step forward and speak publicly about their stories. Shifting the perception of mental illness, and ultimately ending the stigma surrounding its discussion, is his mission, and the mission of Rural Minds.

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Overcoming this silent epidemic, putting an end to the unwarranted stigma that enables it, is my mission. It is the very reason that I began this work.

JEFF WINTON



Ending Stigma, Changing Rural Minds

Thursday, October 19 7:30 PM

Holiday Inn Morgantown

Free Presentation - Open to the public



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