Did you know that September is National Suicide Prevention Month, September 5-11 is National Suicide Prevention Week, and September 10 is World Suicide Prevention Day? While you may be surprised to find that CFMA is addressing this topic, our reasoning for covering and dedicating resources to suicide prevention is fairly straightforward:

If one accepts the premise that our members are responsible for the financial resources of a company and that the health and safety of human capital is one of the most important financial resources, then how could we not get involved in educating the construction industry about this topic?

Our journey along this path began when Cal Beyer, a longtime member of CFMA, proposed an article on the topic of suicide prevention to Kristy Domboski, editor of CFMA Building Profits. When she came into my office to talk about this article, we discussed that even though the topic was outside of the magazine’s usual scope, it was crucial for the construction industry to understand.

As a result, “Mental Illness & Suicide: Break the Silence & Create a Caring Culture” by Cal Beyer and Sally Spencer-Thomas was published in our November/December 2015 issue.

The next and perhaps most crucial step occurred when Cal posted on CFMA’s Connection Café about his upcoming article and the significance of mental health promotion and suicide prevention to the construction industry. The overwhelmingly positive response to Cal’s post was astonishing, as many members publicly shared their personal stories and reinforced the importance of this subject for the construction industry.

Since Cal’s initial Café post, the interest from our membership regarding suicide prevention has exploded.

• On April 7, 2016, CFMA’s Valley of the Sun Chapter hosted a regional summit in Phoenix, AZ, that brought construction company executives together with local mental health providers for education and networking – the first regional event of its kind in the U.S. construction industry, with about 100 attendees.

• At CFMA’s 2016 Annual Conference & Exhibition in San Antonio, TX, Cal and Sally spoke twice on the topic of mental health and suicide prevention.

• Through 2016 and into 2017, regional summits mirroring Valley of the Sun’s format are being planned in a half dozen cities, sponsored by CFMA chapters.

On July 1, 2016, a study released by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reported that workers in construction have the second-highest suicide rate of all occupational groups, which reinforced and heightened our need to address this issue.

We recently established the Construction Industry Alliance for Suicide Prevention (www.cfma.org/suicideprevention) in an effort to gather and disseminate key information and resources, share education and programming, and promote initiatives to support mental health awareness and suicide prevention.

I’m proud to report that on August 23, the National Association of Surety Bond Producers (NASBP) became the first association to become a member of the Alliance! And, CFMA’s Executive Committee recently approved the formation of a CFMA Task Force to oversee the activities of the Alliance.

As you can see, in less than a year, one idea for an article has transformed into an industry-wide movement. I hope you understand and support this important initiative as we lead the construction industry’s efforts to better understand how to prevent suicide among our workforce and improve the mental health of our employees.