

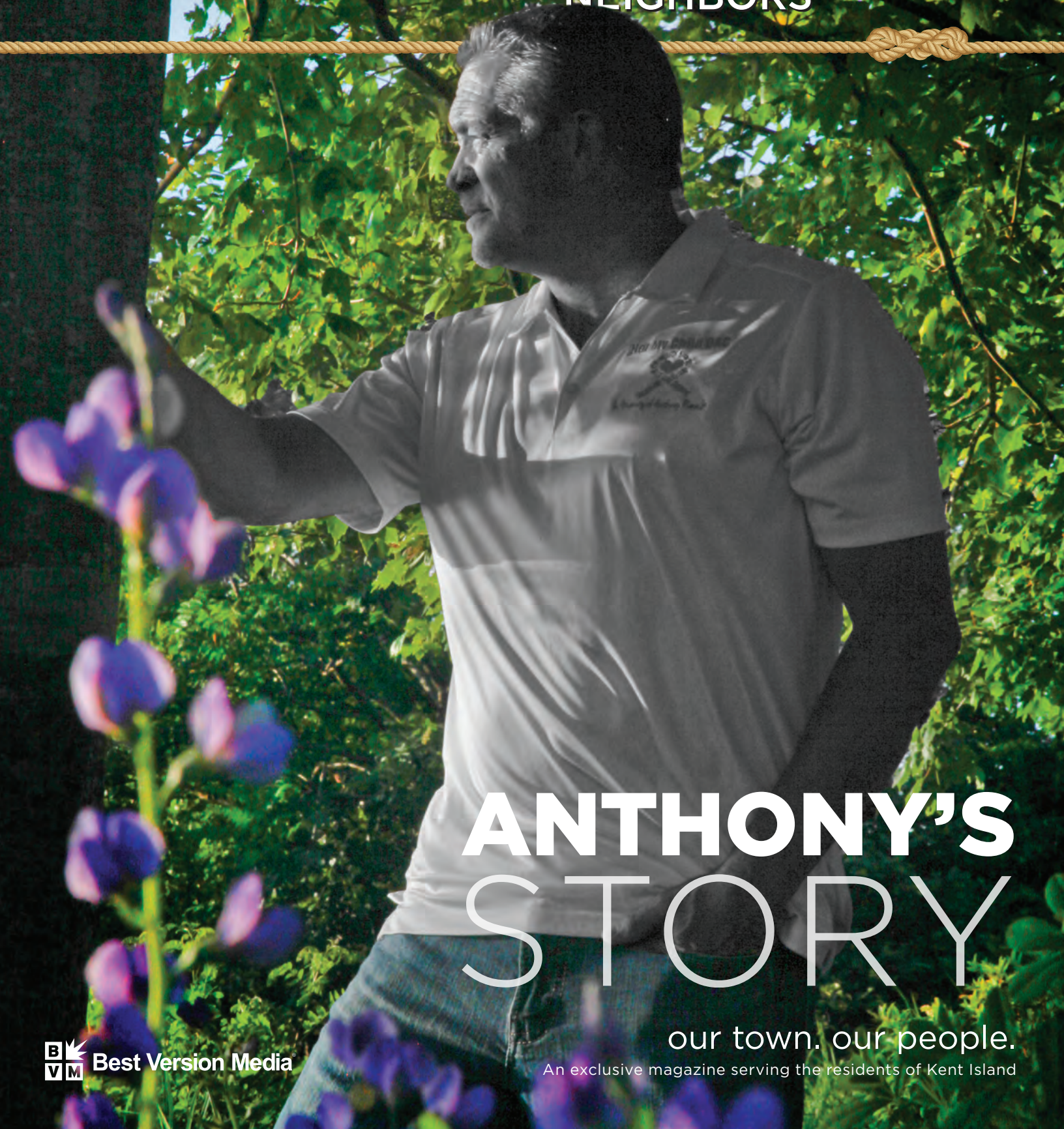
Kent Island

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Photo by ASI Photos

NEIGHBORS



ANTHONY'S STORY

our town. our people.

An exclusive magazine serving the residents of Kent Island



In July of 2017, Anthony Reno Sr. recognized the dire need to combat the opioid epidemic personally and locally. He began laying the groundwork to fund local agencies in efforts to fight the war on drugs. In doing so, he launched "the First Responder Foundation—an organization that provided financial aid to local agencies where he began to educate students and concerned parents on the perils of drug use. To say it was a success would be an understatement—its first event raised over \$11,000 in one evening and was a clear indication of the need for more.

That's what spawned Not My Child, QAC. Its mission is to provide financial support to families impacted by the burdens of burial costs, memorials, treatment co-pays, and emotional support. It also educates the community on the ongoing opioid epidemic and offers a purview on drug awareness, and stereotypes that continue to perpetuate addiction. A special thank you goes out to the generosity of countless friends and families who have joined the Board of Not my Child QAC. It truly is the backbone and heart of the organization. Those involved are a testament to building a safe community. A special thanks go out to the board members: Laura Pell, Lori Freedman, Mike Hamner, Mary & Steve Principe, Lisa Watson, Cindy RenoWilliams, Patty Reno, Mike Roenigk, Susie Taylor, Stephanie Eaton, Theresa Scalco, and lastly, Ivanno Scotto (owner of Red Eyes and Pour House Pub) and staff for hosting its events along with countless volunteers in which I can name dozens who donated their time. Not to mention sponsorships from local businesses, large and small, are just a collaboration of 110% community participation. Thank you, all!

ANTHONY'S STORY

Beth Marx | Photography by ASI Photos

What appeared to be an ordinary day in May, was anything but that. My son was off to a barbeque with his friends where they would typically hover around the grill, chat about 'this and that,' crack a few jokes, and go home with a belly full of burgers and potato salad. Nevertheless, that day was anything but ordinary. I saw an officer walk toward me from a distance and, as he drew closer, said, sir, I am sorry to inform you, but I have some bad news about your son—he didn't make it. At first, I rejected his ghoulish words— thinking it had to be a mistake. But his even stare told me otherwise. That's when my knees buckled, and I collapsed onto the pavement. After he uttered those words, I was never the same again."

I can't imagine anything that supersedes keeping our children and community safe. And drugs are,

without a doubt, our greatest enemy. Anthony Reno, founder of Not My Child, QAC, couldn't attest to it more. After a fatal overdose took his son's life in May of 2017, he spearheaded the non-profit organization in his memory. Like so many victims of substance abuse, Anthony Jr. had met the pervasive disease of addiction head-on. "My son was an accomplished athlete who loved martial arts, lacrosse, football, fishing—and all-around terrific kid with a bright future ahead of him. And ever since his death, I wonder what I could have done to reverse the tragic outcome on that fateful day." Was I paying attention, I'd ask? It's virtually impossible to quiet the voices in my head that repeatedly ask the same questions over and over again ad nauseam. To this day, I come up empty-handed every time, and I imagine that won't change anytime soon. But today, we make it our mission to raise awareness of the ongoing opioid epidemic by offering support in the community wherever needed. Awareness is a critical factor—and Not My Child, QAC provides the resources necessary to make a difference for someone else's child plagued with the disease of addiction and who may be next in line. There are no two ways about it; it's simply unnatural for parents to outlive their children, said Reno—and truth be told, you never get over the death of a child. At the ripe age of 21, Anthony Jr. had unfulfilled goals and aspirations that went by the wayside when a drug overdose brought those dreams to a sudden nose-dive. It took his life and, in turn, bore an invaluable part of ours. Unfortunately, it's never an isolated issue when it comes to addiction. It takes the whole family hostage. His mother, Meghan, sister Morgan, and brother Pierce have all suffered the consequential tragedy, and all we have left are the



cherished memories he left behind for us. As a family, we live vicariously through them with great love and adoration. The nostalgic impression of his smile is baked into our memory and keeps his spirit alive for us, and none of us are willing to lose that," said Reno. No parent wants to believe their child would use drugs, and that's precisely why the nomenclature Not My Child is so prevalent nationwide. But numbers don't lie, and addiction can rear its ugly head and manifest in different ways. In my son's case, he had been diagnosed with Lyme disease—a complex illness to treat, and upon his prognosis, he was in debilitating pain that triggered his narcotic use and fueled his addiction. "As kids grow older and pivot toward different lifestyle choices or new circles of friends, it's our job as parents to notice any significant changes that may seem out of character, off-kilter, or amiss. And when we see a red flag, it's time to sit them down and have that chat."

The many and varied faces of a drug addict don't belong to any particular demographic or stereotype. But the vast misperception, stigma, and optics of what a heroin addict looks like

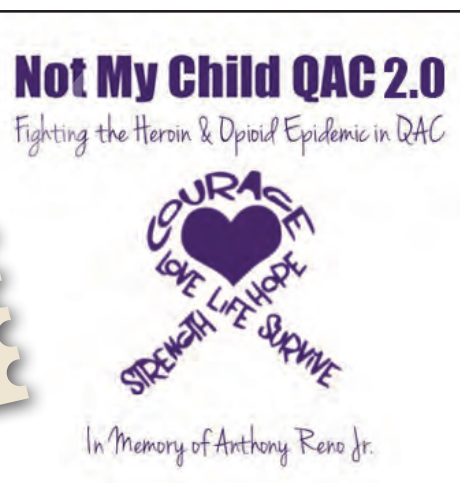
gets vilified, again and again, making it difficult for parents to come clean when asking for bona fide advice when addressing addiction with their child. "Take it from me. It beats the heck out of the alternative, and if we want to fight the Opioid epidemic and overall war on drugs as a community, we need to practice vigilance. In doing so, it is vital to understand how the addiction process unfolds in order to tackle it successfully. "It takes some addicts years of using until they hit their bottom, and they either get sober, live in darkness, or die. But it only took six months to kill my son, and it's always a crapshoot when you're dealing with heroin because you never know what's laced in it.

In many cases, Fentanyl—the most potent opioid, is the primary cause of death, and that's what did my son in. We would do anything to get those cherished years back with Anthony Jr. but, we can't go back in time, so we look forward and make it our mission to mitigate the irreversible and final blow that will save someone else's child. That's more than any parent could ever ask for," said Reno.

Not my Child, QAC is predicated on the understanding that addiction can afflict your child and serves as an educational marker to zero in on any unusual behaviors that seem suspect. Although daunting, at the very least, addiction can be managed through abstinence and twelve-step programs if acknowledged and addressed on time. Addiction is a genetic, chronic, and progressive disease that gets worse over time—and you either have it or don't. That part is indisputable.

NO QUICK FIX

Addicts don't seek out to become "addicts." they slowly transform into them in the wake of pain, genetics, or the burden of both, and some people are





unaware of the genetic pool they swim in until they are drowning in it. But among first-time users, the onset of addiction will activate and trigger cravings for more. Despite the knowledge of its addictive properties, or regardless of the collateral fallout, big pharma and some unbridled pill mills are notorious for turning a blind eye to the dangers of opioids in efforts to preserve its yielded high-profit margins. Moreover, evidence suggests that drug users begin their journey with other substances, referred to as “gateway drugs.” Regrettably, some physicians

don't always take the necessary time to delve into the family history section of the patient intake form, and the endorsement of overly zealous prescribers may do more harm than good. Likewise, physicians who circumvent the proper patient appraisal are at least partially culpable when omitting this crucial step, leaving room for large margins of error. This cataclysmic practice begs the question as to whether some physicians serve as conduits to addiction and reflects a potential flaw in medical ethics. “In certain cases, such as substance abuse, it goes against everything we stand for as physicians,” said Paul Beals, MD. That’s why I practice holistic approaches first, and as a last resort measure, try other drugs sparingly. It’s easy for physicians to dole out pain killers, but the real challenge becomes evident in the aftermath of addiction, and as a result, the community pays the price for it.”

RABBIT HOLE

Pain is often a precursor to substance abuse, and if the patient is predisposed to addiction, they become dependent on the opioid or narcotic and develop a tolerance to it. Over time, they will require a higher dose to achieve the same ‘high’ efficacy, and tolerance is the smoking gun that reveals the beginning stages of substance abuse. In a predisposed patient, the dopamine effects or reward pathway of the neurotransmitters in the brain will bait the addict in and produce a craving for the euphoric sensation they

got at the initial phase of their opioid or drug use. At that point, they will begin to self-medicate and exhibit habit-forming patterns. Following tolerance to the drug and, in its absence, the patient will also experience withdrawal symptoms which further substantiates the dependency that is so dangerously cultivated. Over time, a full-fledged addiction will rear its ugly head, and instead of having one problem, they’ll have two.

Regardless of brand type, almost all opioids mimic the effects of heroin with their poignant resemblance and uncanny, clone-like characteristics, and for all intents and purposes, the drug effects are virtually interchangeable. Some common patterns spurred by the behavioral epidemiology of addiction include refilling prescriptions too soon, spikes in doctor-shopping, pharmacy patient cut-offs, or paying cash so that insurance companies cannot track the quantities or frequency of the drugs filled. And when their pharmaceutical options are exhausted, it has users turning to the streets for their first real fix street goers call smack. It soon after marks their journey down the rabbit hole—officially transitioning them from patient status to addict status. But substances bought on the black market can be the difference between life and death because of the unknown substances that come with them. Too often, it contributes to increased overdoses and death tolls—and what addicts fail to recognize is that their first hit could easily be their last.