

determined by the weather or crop prices, which are totally out of our individual control. There's a lot that can weigh on a person. The job often requires solitary work. That gives us time alone with our thoughts, which is not always healthy. Professor Ferrell says that we must be able to deal with everything that comes from operating in agriculture, but humans don't have an unlimited ability to process stress, trouble, and trauma without some sort of coping mechanism or support. If you are familiar with the impacts of stress and mental health, you know that substance abuse is one of our foremost coping mechanisms in rural America, which leads to addiction and its negative consequences on individuals, their families, and the community at large.

The Drivers article notes that each year in America, one in five adults will experience a mental health issue, but sadly, two-thirds of those will not seek treatment. One in twenty five Americans will experience a mental health issue so severe that it impacts their ability to work, interact with family, or carry out life's regular activities. In essence, they are incapacitated from normal life.

That's the trouble with toughness. It can be a good thing. It can help us achieve our goals and overcome challenges that life throws our way. But we cannot let it turn toxic. If we do, and if we refuse to process our struggles, it can take us to unhealthy and even dangerous places in our mind.

Professor Ferrell told his audience "one of the most important things we can do in agriculture is erase the stigma associated with mental illness. We can let people know it is okay to talk about emotions, to talk about mental health, and to talk about getting help." This is good advice for

Trailer Fire Causes Traffic Snarl! *A fire caused by a flat tire on the trailer of a cattle truck brought traffic to a standstill last Sunday evening, May 9 (right photo). The truck pulled over just south of the US Highway 277/State Highway 70 intersection (Y), 8 miles north of Bronte. Most of the 42 head of cattle survived and were unloaded onto the highway with several being loaded straight into another truck. Sheriff Wayne McCutchen called in local cowboys who were able to get the grown cows off the roadway. Responding agencies included Coke County Sheriff's Office, Bronte Volunteer Fire Department, Texas Parks and Wildlife, East Coke County Ambulance Service, and Texas Department of Public Safety.*



agriculture but also for rural America at large.

What better time than the present, in the middle of Mental Health Awareness Month, to work on that very thing? Every time I write about mental health in these essays, I am heartened by the courage of readers who respond both privately and publicly to share their own mental health struggles. If you have ever shared your story with another person, believe me, you are impacting others in ways that you may not even realize.

It is okay to talk about our emotions. Do not let some ideal of toughness turn toxic in your life. Do not be afraid to be real and raw with yourself and with folks you trust. If you do that, you'll help yourself and others more than you know.

James Decker is the Mayor of Stamford, Texas and the creator of the West of 98 website and podcast. Contact James and subscribe to these essays at westof98.substack.com and subscribe to West of 98 wherever podcasts are found.



Accident at Tennyson! *On Friday morning, May 7, a 19 year old woman was driving southbound near Tennyson when she struck the wheels of a northbound truck-trailer, spinning her around and trapping her in her car. An out of town EMT, nurse passing by, and a former National Guard MP were on scene at the time and were at her side before the car's airbags had even deflated. Several other civilians were also able to assist with providing aid. Shannon's AirMed1 (pictured above) made a landing on US Highway 277 to transport the injured woman. Responding agencies included Coke County Sheriff's Office, Bronte Volunteer Fire Department, East Coke County Ambulance Service, and West Coke County EMS. AirMed ended last week with four total emergency flights to East Coke County.*

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Our hearts are heavy and our prayers go out to the families, both blood and law enforcement, of these two fallen peace officers.



Concho County Sheriff's Deputy Stephen Jones, age 34, and Deputy Samuel Leonard, age 26, were shot and killed responding to a call in Eden on Monday evening, May 10, 2021.

Please join us for a
**Bronte Cemetery
 Clean-Up**
Saturday, May 15, 2021
8 am - 10 am

Bring your gloves, shovels, hoes, rakes, and your lopping shears as we clean up where many of our families are laid to rest.