

Inroads on mental health

New understanding guides local efforts

By **ELODIE REED**
Messenger Staff Writer

ST. ALBANS — When you hear the term, “mentally ill,” what comes to mind?

Typically a community learns about mental illness in a way that’s disconnected from the illness. Media, police reports, court decisions, word of mouth: many times, these sources fail to acknowledge the crisis people may be in as they commit criminal, desperate or unusual acts.

Some local examples from the *Messenger* in recent months include: a man stealing a police cruiser and crashing into a telephone pole; another man wielding a knife in the local emergency room; a young man burning his parents’ barn.


Without looking at the cause behind these incidents, stigmas remain, and an opportunity to educate and strengthen

the community gets lost.

Fortunately in Franklin County and across the state, efforts are being made to become more informed and respond more effectively to mental illness. Law enforcement is working with mental health clinicians, mental health first aid classes and education events are being offered to residents and service providers, community resources are being utilized, and mental health professionals are finding better ways to treat patients.

While mental health isn’t handled perfectly in this community, it’s on a good path forward, according to local officials. “I think there’s definitely cause for concern,” said Dr. Steve Broer, director of Behavioral Health Services at Northwestern Counseling and Support Services. “But I also think there’s a cause for hopefulness.”

► See **HEALTH** on page 9A



AmCare Ambulance workers Jonathan Cullen, right, and Alex Wright, left, wheel a stretcher out of Northwestern Medical Center’s emergency room on Thursday afternoon.