

How about mental illness control?

Richard Alan Folbert dresses the part: a gray suit he picked up for \$40 at a thrift store, a tie that set him back 50 cents, a striped shirt he scored in a donation bin and a pair of black loafers he bought at Kmart.

He looks good, normal, a little bloated, but that could be a side effect of the anti-depressant he takes.

At 52, Folbert is a face of recovery, the success story of a once-violent, suicidal, paranoid-schizophrenic, delusional drug addict with a gambling jones, who flipped out big-time on Oct. 13, 2002.

On that Sunday, he was sitting in a pew at St. Angela Merici Catholic Church in Fairview Park. During Holy Communion, Folbert rose and screamed: "May I have your attention, please? I am Richard Allen [sic]. I am Satan. I want to confess that I killed Amy Mihaljevic. I will kill you all," according to a Fairview Park police report.

Police quickly determined that Folbert did not murder the 10-year-old Bay Village elementary school student, who was kidnapped and killed in October 1989. Why he confessed to such a heinous crime is lost in the mists of mental illness.

Mihaljevic's murder remains a mystery.

Folbert was charged with inducing panic, a fourth-degree felony. During their investigation, Fairview Park police were contacted by Folbert's mother, who said her son had attempted to commit suicide, according to investigative reports. The police also talked to a social worker who said Folbert had become infatuated with her in 2001, and then angry when she didn't respond. Folbert showed up at her office with a weapon and threatened to kill her, according to investigative



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files. That incident earned Folbert a Cleveland police escort to Lakewood Hospital for a psychiatric evaluation.

Nor was the church outburst the first time Folbert had come to the attention of Fairview

Park police. A terse incident report on Feb. 16, 2002, stated that Folbert planned to kill 7,000 people in Lakewood that night "for God." Folbert was taken to Fairview Hospital for a psychiatric evaluation.

The church incident earned him 74 days behind bars. Then he was shuffled off to a now-shuttered state-funded psychiatric hospital on the West Side.

The way Folbert tells the story, he was released a few days later. He bunked at a homeless shelter and, lo and behold, found the kind of peer support and empowerment that enabled him to get the appropriate treatment and medication to transform himself into a responsible citizen.

Today, he has just been reappointed by the state to the Cuyahoga County Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services Board as a consumer representative. He is their poster child — proof positive that access to services and proper treatment does save lives.

Mental health care is a hot topic these days. It is a thread that runs through the cold-blooded Chardon High School shootings; the Aurora, Colo., killings; the Portland, Ore., mall murders; the slaughter of children in Newtown, Conn.; and the ambush of firefighters in upstate New York.

The other thread, of course, is the accessibility of firearms. I don't expect there will be any meaningful political sanctions against the out-of-control gun industry. But what about mental health care? What are we doing to provide

adequate services to that at-risk population?

"The fact is that providing adequate care for the mentally ill is a low priority," said Bill Denihan, head honcho of the county's alcohol, drug and mental health services board. "We know that, per capita, we [in Cuyahoga County] have a greater number of schizophrenia and bipolar consumers than any other county in the state. In spite of that, we have the lowest level of funding in the state."

Cuyahoga County receives 20 cents per capita from the Ohio Department of Mental Health, even though the state average is \$4.20, according to figures provided by Denihan.

"I do not disagree that there is a lack of parity," said Tracy Plouck, director of the department. She said she is meeting weekly with stakeholders, including Denihan, to develop allocation scenarios that are more uniform statewide. But Plouck noted that funding levels are uncertain since the governor's budget doesn't come out until next month. "We don't know there will be additional investment."

Denihan describes the lack of appropriate funding for mental health services mixed with the easy availability of guns as a "recipe for disaster."

There are fewer and fewer Folbert-like success stories because there are fewer and fewer services.

"There's a reason the largest mental health hospital in the state of Ohio is the prison system," Denihan said.

That reason is inadequate funding. Plouck needs to find the pluck to do something about it.

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