

## **School Resource Officers Serve Students and Community**

Story and Photos by Kathleen Culler as published in Postscripts, January 2003

The placement of police officers in schools today has become fairly routine, reports High School Principal Ms. Dorothy Gould, but many people misunderstand why they are here in Hopkinton. In explaining the School Resource Officer's (SRO) role, Ms. Gould notes a common misconception: "Most of us think of theft, assault, drugs, and the volatile student who needs to be controlled. Occasionally that happens, and people think he's here for that. But the SRO is really here to develop positive relationships with the students. That's the most important thing because he is here to be a real person for them, to be an officer who will connect with our students."

Middle School Principal, Mrs. Beth Wittcoff, concurs that there is a positive value in the SRO's authentic relationship with students: "We want the SRO to be visible, connected to the students, and to be seen as part of the school team. We want our students to see that a policeman can be their friend and that the policeman can provide them with valid information and support, too."

In Hopkinton, there are two town-funded SROs. Officer David Shane serves at the Middle School while Officer Jay Porter works at the High School.

In addition to spending a lot of time interacting with students in the halls and cafeteria and on the school grounds, the SROs provide a wide array of services to the schools. As part of the crisis response team, they advise on a variety of issues ranging from policy on locked doors through a formal lockdown in the event of an emergency. SROs advise on student truancy issues, and they keep the principals apprised of any off-campus events that might impact the schools. When a change in procedure is contemplated, the SRO is consulted for his expertise on safety. Parking issues are supervised by the SROs. The SROs also are active in the classroom, teaching subjects that include drug and alcohol safety. They provide training for teachers on drug and alcohol issues involving students. Officers Porter and Shane also teach the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) program that is routinely presented in the schools, beginning with Grade 5 at Hopkins School.

The principals also value the SRO's speedy access to information. In last semester's whooping cough case at the high school, for example, students and their families had to be found, and Officer Porter was able to provide help and contacts very quickly.

With a goal of building life-long positive attitudes about the police and their role in society, the SRO program seeks to assist the students, the schools, and their families in understanding that the police can serve as a positive and supportive resource in any community. Parents may also consult with the SROs, and parents are invited to contact Officer David Shane at the Middle School, 508-497-9830, and Officer Jay Porter at the High School, 508-497-9820, with questions about the SRO program or about issues facing their children today.