

School officer builds relationships

Part of FHUSD safety plan

By Bob Burns
Times Reporter

Sheriff's Deputy Jill Ochsner likes kids, and with her job as school resource officer in the School District she loves seeing the progress they make as they get closer to becoming adults.

"It's cool to see them grow, mature and become productive people," Ochsner said. "That's what I love about this job, I can help guide and influence them to make good choices."

Ochsner represents the law on local school campuses, and those students who make poor choices soon learn there are consequences.

"If they bring drugs or alcohol or do something criminal on campus, I have zero tolerance," Ochsner said.

"Once (students) learn and know how I operate and learn what to expect from me, it's a good relationship."

Ochsner splits time between Fountain Hills High School and Middle School and visits McDowell Moun-

tain Elementary School periodically. She also makes regular contact with Fountain Hills Charter School.

Ochsner's supervisor, Lt. Dave Munley, says she has a good working relationship with the teachers and administrators at the schools.

"(I and Capt. Joe Rodriguez) wanted her back in that position," Munley said. "We were happy with her work and received good comments."

"We can see the importance of having an SRO. A lot of stuff goes on at the schools and this is a very important job."

"We like having her there at the schools and hope to continue."

School District Superintendent Tom Lawrence said the district is appreciative of MCSO and the town for providing a SRO for the district.

"The advantage to having a resource officer on campus is that she provides a comprehensive resource for us in the role of law enforcement officer, law-related counselor/advisor and law-related education teacher," Lawrence said.



Fountain Hills High School campus is part of the beat for School Resource Officer Jill Ochsner.

"A couple of the bigger benefits to having her on campus is that she helps us to work proactively with some of the pressures that today's youth have to deal with as well as works to protect the school environment."

Ochsner started the job as SRO in 2008, but returned to patrol duty for about a year in 2010. Her duties sometimes extend beyond classroom hours

with activities on campus as well as the monthly Midnight Madness events.

Ochsner works closely with the town's Community Services Department in organizing the Midnight Madness that gives young teens a chance to get together for fun, supervised activities after class.

She is also largely responsible for overseeing the Text-A-Tip program. Most of the calls gener-

ated deal with students, whether on campus or off.

"Text-A-Tip has really helped increase communication," Ochsner said. "We get a lot of reports related to drugs or alcohol on campus, bullying and even potential suicides."

"I have concern for the students. I want to help them make good choices, not just give them a hard time."

School security

Being on campus, Ochsner is likely to be the first on the scene should an event such as a school shooter occur. Since the Sandy Hook school massacre in Connecticut, taking steps to prevent such an emergency has become a priority.

Ochsner said the Monday after the Connecticut shooting the Sheriff's Of-

fice, the School District and fire department established a committee to review existing policies and procedures.

"We want to enhance or improve what exists to have the most current plan available," Ochsner said. "It is a top priority to get this implemented."

Ochsner said she has confidence in the Posse and it is good to know they are working hard to stay near-by. Sheriff Joe Arpaio has assigned Posse members to patrol school neighborhoods to watch for suspicious activity and be near-by.

Both Ochsner and Munley said they would like to have an SRO in every school.

"Law enforcement has gotten away from that," Munley said. "Financially it is difficult."

Posse helping patrol near schools

Standing on the grounds of a North Valley elementary school, Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio last week formally launched one of the biggest undertakings of his all-volunteer posse -- patrolling areas surrounding all 59 schools in his primary jurisdiction each school day for the remainder of the school year.

Arpaio's all-volunteer posse numbers over 3,000 male and female volunteers, at least 500 of whom are armed, trained and qualified with the same weapons as deputies.

They will be joined by reserve and patrol deputies as they work to massively increase the visibility of uniformed law enforcement personnel in marked Sheriff's vehicles patrolling the areas surrounding elementary, middle and high schools.

The Fountain Hills Sheriff's Posse has already implemented a local plan and the law enforcement

presence near local campuses has increased since school started after the holiday break.

Arpaio said the posse will not be on school grounds nor will they be inside schools, but each will act as additional eyes and ears keeping a watchful eye on any suspicious activity that occurs near or around school property.

If a serious situation occurs however, the Sheriff's posse will take necessary action.

Arpaio's posse, the nation's largest group of trained law enforcement volunteers, has been successfully used in several law enforcement operations over the years including illegal immigration, DUI patrols, crime suppression operations, and the annual mall posse patrol -- a month-long effort to keep the shopping public safe at major Valley malls during the busy holiday season.

Their presence is well known and well publicized.

Violent crime at malls during the holiday has been virtually nonexistent since the program was initiated in 1993, Arpaio said, pointing to the mall patrol program as proof that a massive display of law enforcement presence can be an effective deterrent to crime.

This school program is an even larger undertaking by the Sheriff's posse in terms of length of operation including the number of days, hours and school areas that must be covered.

The idea was introduced by Arpaio to his posse and staff several days after the Connecticut shooting and the local Red Mountain High School plot which Sheriff's deputies investigated a few weeks ago.

In the Red Mountain plot, a 16-year-old Mesa resident, student and teacher's assistant at the high school had planned to

kill fellow students at the high school using guns and possibly a bomb. Sheriff's deputies arrested the girl after being alerted to the plot by her YouTube.com posts found on a transgender channel.

"There is a lot of discussion on the national level about placing an armed law enforcement officer in every school," Arpaio said. "And while I support that idea, this is not what our posse program is designed to be."

"School administrators, teachers and parents must understand that the posse's focus will be strictly to enhance security in the areas surrounding our schools."

Arpaio said he does not support the idea of arming teachers with weapons.

"Men and women become teachers because they want to carry new ideas, not guns, into the classroom," he said.

But a more effective solution to school security does need to be developed, the sheriff said.

Arpaio believes that there will likely be collaboration between government and technology that will ultimately find a way to stop persons bent on committing heinous acts as those in Colorado and Connecticut from being able to successfully carry out their madness.

Until another plan comes into play, Arpaio says his posses are up to the challenge.

"We owe it to the community to do whatever we can to offset the fear many parents, teachers and administrators are experiencing as a result of the school shootings our nation has endured," he concluded.

*Text-A-Tip going strong

The Fountain Hills Coalition continues to partner with local merchants to help spread the word about Text-A-Tip.

The program was launched in the fall of 2011 in cooperation with the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office.

Text-A-Tip is a crime-prevention program used by law enforcement agencies across the country to assist them in keeping their communities safe.

Text-A-Tip allows information to be communicated in a timely, concise manner and is 100 percent anonymous.

The Fountain Hills program has led to various arrests and citations on campuses as well as in the community, most of them concentrated on drugs and alcohol use by minors.

"We have established a presence with students at the high school and middle school where it has been proven to be effective," said Maria Perreault, who helps coordinate coalition programs.

"In asking businesses to participate, we hope to increase the visibility and practice of Text-A-Tip throughout Fountain Hills."

For one month, merchants place a Text-A-Tip flier in a highly visible location (on a door, window, main counter, etc.) and Text-A-Tip "business cards" by their registers.

Perreault wanted to thank those businesses that assisted the program in 2012.

They included Fountain Bowl (now PINZ), CVS, Little Caesar's, 4 Sons, CSI Printing, Paul's ACE Hardware, DJ's Bagels, Bashas', Dr. Patel, Walgreens, Redendo's/Sofrita, FH Computer Services, Sami's Fine Jewelry and Friendship Animal Hospital.

Also, Denny's, Circle K, Euro Pizza, Francis & Sons Car Wash, Dunkin' Donuts, Big O Tires, Pisa Pizza, Apian Way, Anytime Fitness,

Great Clips, Pony Express, Sweet Town, Sun Devil Auto and You Need Nails & Spa.

Others included Phil's Filling Station, Cut Above Hair Salon, AZ Trails Travel, Flapjack's, LeBaron Cleaners, MyBullFrog/Verizon, Radiant Brides, Sears, Park Avenue Hair Co., Martinizing Cleaners, Snap Fitness, Deluxe Nails and Sherwin-Williams.

If interested in having a business participate in the Text-A-Tip campaign or would like more information on Text-A-Tip, contact Perreault at maria.prmedialogs@cox.net or (480) 203-1568.