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Bailey smiled and waved. The teens' faces turned white. "She looked back at me and went, 'Uh oh,'" Bailey said. Twice in a row, it seemed that Bailey and his cohorts came too early. Bailey assessed the situation so far. "We're doing our job, we're just doing it a little weird, a little early. Maybe they'll just make fearful better decisions. We don't know for sure if a party is going to happen. We want to let it get to a point where we can get in and stop them from drinking alcohol and then driving. But we don't know if it will happen for sure, and we don't have the resources to sit outside every single house."

It was decided to let the parties mature a bit, allow youth to gather, and then come in and make sure the party goers were acting safely and responsibly. In the meantime, Bailey and Merryman drove around town to the usual gathering sites — the North and South Jetties of the Siuslaw River and the various parks throughout the region. Along the way, Bailey spoke to why he got into the police force, and the impact of being a resource officer for the Siuslaw School District.

‘OUR CHILDREN ARE SAFE’

"I was in the army for seven years," Bailey said. "I was on tanks, big rolling booms. Deployed to Iraq for a year but decided that wasn't for me. I knew I wanted to be in something that was similar but didn't want it to take me away from my family."

He said he knew he wanted to be a cop since he was "knee high," so he applied for a position at the Florence Municipal Jail. That was four years ago. "I just knew that this job would be ever changing," he said. "It wouldn't be the same thing every day."

He worked his way up to patrol and was then asked to take

over the school resource officer position from Florence Police Sgt. Brandon Ott, who had been doing the job for a number of months. The role was different from what Bailey had expected. "I really liked being on the street, getting bad guys," he said. "It was a lot of fun. But being a resource officer with the kids is more challenging in ways."

The biggest challenge was changing the perception that youth have of police officers. "When we first got in the schools, kids were like, 'Uh oh, why are the police here?'" Bailey said. "It's because we weren't ever in the schools unless somebody was in trouble. Over the course of this year, the transition has been insane."

Bailey described one of the moments he knew that the students were beginning to be more comfortable with him. It was an assembly at the elementary school. There was a tug of war, kindergartners versus the fifth-graders. It was an exercise in courage, knowing that just because the odds seemed stacked against you, you have to have the nerve to give it a try anyway. "So it was the little kids against these big fifth-graders," Bailey said. "Before they start pulling, the staff offered a little help. They come running over, and the whole school went wild. I decided to run over too, and they went absolutely bonkers. It was a lot of fun to see them react. Luckily, at that age, kids still like the police. It was really fun. It was school to see the kids look so positively on the staff and myself."

Now kids feel comfortable with asking Bailey a whole host of questions, from how many "bad guys" he's sent to jail to how many guns he owns. And of course, they like to ask him for stickers from the Florence Police Department. But building trust between law enforcement and students goes

beyond just answering questions. It is vital to help Bailey to do more investigative work. He works closely with the staff of the school on issues, trading off expertise in moments of crisis. "I also get involved with discipline and I investigate anything criminal, like getting confessions on stolen items," he said. "Teachers may not be able to get information out of a student, but with my tactics, I'm able to get confessions and recover the property."

Because the students are comfortable with Bailey, his interactions in those instances are not combative, but supportive. That relationship goes beyond the boundaries of the school district. "When we go to a call involving kids at nighttime, the kids are much more receptive to us and not afraid," he said. "And I believe that's the presence in school."

He also plays an important role in threat assessments, determining if a child is physically dangerous to themselves or others. He was unable to give specifics, but said that such occurrences are rare. It's a different world for youth today, and they are faced with different challenges that would be unthinkable 20 years ago. One of the most prevalent changes is the threat of school shootings, which has thrust the importance of resource officers like Bailey into the spotlight. It's these kinds of fears that can put children in a perpetual state of panic. "The school has taken good steps and measures to protect themselves, as far as security,"

Bailey said. "Our children are safe."

There is a more common threat to children that he sees, one that is much more difficult to curb. "Social media is the worst," Bailey lamented. "It's hard to deal with and combat. People try, but they can't stop using social media. They can't stop behaviors on social media. Kids are always using it for the wrong reasons. They'll bash each other on there and post a bunch of stuff that they shouldn't. It's just hard. It's all a bunch of drama that's easily avoidable."

One of the best ways to combat that drama is to make sure that youth know adults are there to support them, and that they understand the issues they're going through. "It seems like my presence, or the presence of a police officer in uniform, motivates and changes a kid's behavior just by simply being there," he said. And his presence also helps staff deal with the challenges of the everyday life of a student. "The school also has been really awesome to work with," Bailey said. "The staff and administration have seen the benefit of having a police officer in schools. There's the security thing, but I have a different perspective on things, a different opinion on certain situations that they're dealing with collectively. Through their experience and me, we really work well together."

Bailey is as much a resource to the staff as he is to the students. And the results of their efforts is trust. "The kids will come up and give hugs," Bailey said with pride.

prefers to handle situations. The first instance was a van parked next to a group of overgrown Scotch Broom. Bailey got out, knocked on the window. Someone was sleeping inside. He checked the license to make sure there was no criminal record, then went back to the van and handed them a card he had removed from his pocket. "I just gave her the card to Siuslaw Outreach Services for information," Bailey explained. "Just trying to help her out."

There were lovers parked near the beach, looking out at the ocean. Bailey told them they might want to move along. There was family in crisis who wanted a quiet, safe place to work out their issues. Bailey and Merryman checked on them, asking about their situation, making sure they were okay. Then there was the car full of 20-somethings who were driving around the South Jetty. Bailey had spotted them when they had first pulled into the area and followed them throughout the winding turns out to the beach. When the car finally stopped, Bailey pulled alongside of them. "Do you know anywhere we can go on the beach at this point?" the driver asked. Bailey informed them that this was a day-use area. "Ah, okay, cool," the driver said as he laughed, relieved. "I was wondering why you were following me."

The car moved along. The patrol then made its way up to a campground at Sand Dunes Frontier, where small groups of vacationing ATVers were camping and chatting the night away. "We're looking for teen drinking for MIPs, seen any?" Bailey asked. "My kids are all adults now," one woman joked. They ended up chatting about why the campers were there — tourists from out of town enjoying the weekend. They offered Bailey a hot dog. "It's actually illegal for us take food," Bailey explained later. "We can't take any kind of coffee or food, or anything, which I agree with."

Giving a gift like food or coffee to an officer could be construed as a bribe. "It's super awkward when someone is trying to buy you coffee and you have to explain why," he said. It's these kinds of interactions that Bailey is most used to on his patrol. "It's kind of a weird spot for law enforcement in the nation right now. You have bad cops, they're in this world," he said,

referring to the number of officer-involved shootings in recent years. "But we have really good officers, especially in Florence. And we work well together."

And Bailey has found that the community has worked well together, too, when it comes to law enforcement. Protecting a community is not about handing out tickets or arresting people, according to Bailey. It's about being proactive, making sure that officers interact positively with people before such measures are needed. And communicating is the key to that strategy. "I like talking to people," he said. "That's why I got into this."

But sometimes citations, like MIPs, have to be made. And it was for this reason that it was time to revisit the prom night house parties.

‘I CALL THAT A SUCCESS’

The first stop was the city house, the one where the single car of kids was seen driving around. Bailey drove up the street, cut the lights and silently pulled up just a few doors down from the suspected house. He got out, looked around. Everything was quiet. There were a few lights on, odd for this time of night, but no loud noises or extra cars. No reason to be suspicious of anything. While the gathering of youth for that party was suspect from the get go, the party outside city limits, the one with multiple carloads of kids driving to, seemed like the surest bet for the night. A group of police cars, carrying about half a dozen officers, caravanned to the house just after 1 a.m. The cars traveled up the narrow road and came to an alcove in the small neighborhood. The officers parked, turned off their lights and quietly exited their vehicles. The officers used no flashlights as they pooled together, instead relying on the moon and a few various porchlights in the vicinity. They walked toward the address quietly, each one listening for music, kids laughing and talking. Looking for multiple lights on in a house, and of course the cars they had already seen earlier. As they worked their way down the road, they all stopped and looked. The area was silent. No wind. No rain. Not even a cricket. And no party. Bailey smiled a bit, as did the others. They walked back to their vehicles, checked the neighborhood one more time and drove down the streets. They worked their way through the backwoods, checking small parks. Still no sign of the ultimate prom night party. That didn't mean the night wasn't successful for Bailey. "No MIPs means no intoxicated juveniles that I know of," he said as he drove back to the station. Even though Bailey described how the evening went as "weird," he believed the officers came up to the parties at the right time. By seeing that the police were out on patrol, it's possible that the parties ended before they even began. "Will I bury my head in the sand and say that we stopped it all?" he asked. "No way. But we did everything we could, and we were proactive as we could be."

It's the presence of an active police force in the community looking out for the youth, and everyone else Bailey met that night, that may have ultimately been the deciding factor in the effort. "We put a lot of time in tonight, and we made a lot of contact," Bailey said. "And we were visible. There was always a possibility we wouldn't find anything, but I like that we were being proactive to deter dangerous behavior. If we stopped people from drinking, then we absolutely did our job. I think of it as a win for us. Hopefully the kids took our presence as something that deterred who knows how many kids from drinking. "I call that a success."

The Rhododendron Festival Court is organized by the Florence Area Chamber of Commerce but would not be possible without the many volunteers and sponsors.

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‘I LIKE TALKING TO PEOPLE’

The day-use parks around the Siuslaw region are busier than one would think in the middle of the night. As Bailey and Merryman waited for the prom parties to mature, they drove around looking for other possible MIP infractions. While they didn't find any teenagers, there were multiple cars sitting out in the moonlight near the sandy beaches. It's how Bailey interacted with these individuals that showed how Florence Police Department

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