

A sum greater than its parts

Youth services officer at elementary schools yields police-school synergism

By SEAN HART
Staff Writer

Hermiston police and school officials believe it is beneficial that elementary school students have some positive encounters with police officers in the school environment.

Hermiston's school district and police department have collaborated for years to provide a school resource officer who rotated between the two middle schools and the high school. This year, the two entities expanded their partnership to provide an additional officer for the five elementary schools.

Officer Erica Sandoval's role as crime prevention officer was modified to include new responsibilities as youth services officer.

Chief Jason Edmiston said with the change the school district is paying half of Sandoval's salary — in addition to funding 75 percent of School Resource Officer Tim Mears' position. Neither officer's role is traditional, he said.

"It's not about policing the schools," Edmiston said. "It's about building relationships. It's not just relationships with the kids. It's relationships with the staff and the parents. There is value in this."

Sandoval said, despite initial reluctance to the idea, she loves being in the schools and the opportunity to make a difference.

"For us as officers, myself and Tim, being in the non-traditional roles we are in is going to teach these children, who will grow up to be adults,



STAFF PHOTO BY KATHY ANEY

Erica Sandoval, of the Hermiston Police Department, eats lunch with students at Highland Hills Elementary School on Monday as part of her duties as youth services officer.

a different way of looking at the police," she said. "I love it, because it's proactive. It's positive. I think it's a win-win on both sides."

Educating students about police

Hermiston School District Director of Operations Mike Kay said Officer Mears has been a great resource, helping with truancy issues, criminal matters and monitoring activities at the middle and high schools. Those duties, however, occupy most of his time.

"Just having that extra set of boots on the ground is wonderful with Erica," Kay said. "It allows Tim to be a little more in depth with what he's doing with relationship building with the secondary kids."

Kay said Sandoval is great at connecting with the young students. Even before being the youth services officer, she worked well with children through the Hermiston Community Accountability Board, a program that provides juveniles the opportunity to avoid the justice system through compliance with the board's directives.

"Any time you have an opportunity to have our kids interact in a positive manner with law enforcement at a

young age is a great plus for us," Kay said. "It allows Erica to engage with some of our youngest, potentially at-risk kids. She's absolutely a rock star at that stuff."

Highland Hills Elementary School counselor Elizabeth Morgan said it was great to have a visible police presence in the schools. She said Sandoval is not only a positive role model, she can also help students have a better understanding of what police officers do.

Sandoval said she occasionally eats lunch at the different schools. She is present when kids arrive and leave for the day. She visits classrooms for special events.

At a Halloween event about a month after she started in her new role, Sandoval said students' parents were approaching her, telling her how much the students were talking about her at home.

"That was significant for me, because I really didn't do anything other than going to the schools and just trying to make a presence there," she said.

Improving policing through relationships

Edmiston said when Hermiston School District Superintendent Fred Maiocco



STAFF PHOTO BY KATHY ANEY

Erica Sandoval, of the Hermiston Police Department, visited with students at Highland Hills Elementary School on Monday as part of her duties as youth services officer.

pitched the idea for an officer at the elementary schools, it immediately made sense from a law enforcement perspective.

Police and school officials have together conducted tabletop exercises annually for several years to prepare for catastrophic events, he said. Two officers with firsthand knowledge of the schools and district policies would make the department even more prepared to respond in a chaotic situation, he said.

Through positive police-student relationships, he said many poor decisions may even be prevented.

"A lot of people may not see the extreme value in this," Edmiston said. "We are getting into the schools and having positive interactions, making positive changes with the youth, before they really start getting into decision making on their own."

Sandoval said many students she met through the



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Erica Sandoval, of the Hermiston Police Department, eats lunch with students at Highland Hills Elementary School on Monday as part of her duties as youth services officer.

Community Accountability Board maintained relationships with her after they completed the program. Some have returned to Hermiston with college degrees and told her they chose a new path, so as not to disappoint her.

Sandoval's direct supervisor, Capt. Travis Eynon, who is also a member of the

Umatilla School Board, said he believed adding the youth services officer was the single most significant action the department has taken all year.

"It's an opportunity for synergism with the schools and the police department," he said. "The two parts together are stronger than the two parts apart."

IN BRIEF

Classes provide driving refresher course

A pair of AARP driving classes are offered next week in Hermiston.

The sessions provide information on defensive driving skills, a refresher for rules of the road and how to manage age-related changes in vision, hearing and reaction time. While the class is geared towards older adults, all licensed drivers are welcome to attend.

The class is available Thursday, Dec. 10 at 11 a.m. or 6 p.m. at the Bob Shannon Safety Center, 330 S. First St., Hermiston. The cost is \$15 for AARP mem-

bers and \$20 for non-members.

For more information or to register, call Rose Emerson at 541-667-5092.

Umatilla chamber hosts open house

A holiday open house is planned at the Umatilla Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center.

The public is invited to enjoy food, fun, friendship and an opportunity to win prizes. The free holiday open house is Thursday, Dec. 10 from 2-6 p.m. at the Welcome Center, 100 Cline Ave., Umatilla.

For more information, contact Executive Director Karen Hutchinson-Talaski

at karen@umatillachamber.net or 541-922-4825.

New Hope sets Christmas program

A Christmas Special is planned at New Hope Community Church.

The event includes singing Christmas carols, watching the kids' Christmas program and enjoying Christmas cookies. The music features Louise Sundvall on piano.

Everyone is welcome to come celebrate the season Sunday from 6-7 p.m. at the

church, 1350 S. Highway 395, Hermiston.

For more information, call Doug Fahrenbacher at 541-561-8327.

Hospital auxiliary sets bake sale

A sweet selection is available during the Good Shepherd Auxiliary Bake Sale.

The event is Wednesday, Dec. 9 from 7:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the pharmacy lobby at Good Shepherd Medical Center, 610 N.W. 11th St. Items available include Christmas candy, cakes,

pies, rolls and bread.

Money raised helps provide scholarships for students in medical programs and miscellaneous hospital equipment.

For more information, contact June Rosenberg at juner1942@gmail.com.

SAGE Center rings in Christmas

A weekend movie at the SAGE Center helps rings in the holiday season.

"The Grinch that Stole Christmas" is Friday at 7:15 p.m. and Saturday

at 2:15 p.m. at 101 Olson Road, Boardman. The cost is \$5 for adults and \$3 for children and seniors. Admission includes a bag of popcorn. Water is available for purchase.

People are encouraged to arrive early to enjoy the special holiday light show. The show, which is set to music, is broadcast on 106.9 FM. The light display remains through the end of the year.

The SAGE Center is open Monday through Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. For more information, visit www.visitsage.com or call 541-481-7243.

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