

March 15, 2018

To All Members of Our Community,

In reflecting on recent tragic events, we wanted to take the opportunity to share some information on how your community is prepared for the possibility of a school shooting incident or other school safety threat. We have very strong partnerships and continuously focus on prevention and preparation - work that we take very seriously every day. This message is to introduce you to key members of the team at work for you and some of the efforts under way that you may not be aware of.

School Safety Team

At the Gurnee Police Department, school safety is given full-time attention by our "School Safety Team." This eight member team is made up of veteran law enforcement officers, three are graduates of Gurnee schools, all are parents, and each were selected for their role because of their commitment to children, our schools and our community. The team collectively possesses a vital skill set acquired through many years of law enforcement experience in this community, along with extensive amounts of highly specialized training and a broad understanding of critical incidents gained through their service on regional emergency response teams.

- **Commander Jesse Gonzalez:** Thirty years of law enforcement experience, including twenty years of criminal investigation experience, service as Commander of the Lake County Major Crime Task Force, member of the Northern Illinois Police Alarm System Entry Team (which is often referred to as a SWAT team) and as a rapid deployment instructor for our department.
- **Sergeant Jon Ward:** Twenty-four years of law enforcement experience, has served as a detective, a Northern Illinois Police Alarm System Mobile Field Force member (a team specializing in managing large crowds and demonstrations) along with vast experience as a juvenile officer and evidence technician.
- **Officer Ron Conley:** Twenty-seven years of law enforcement experience, currently serves as the School Resource Officer (SRO) for Woodland District 50 schools. A graduate of that district and of Warren Township High School, he has twenty years of experience as a juvenile officer and an evidence technician.
- **Officer Chad Smits:** Fourteen years of municipal and four years of college campus law enforcement experience, currently serves as the SRO for Gurnee District 56 schools. He is an experienced juvenile officer, gang officer and defensive tactics instructor.
- **Officer Jack Metcalf:** Twenty-three years of law enforcement experience, a graduate of Warren Township High School District 121 who previously served as a substitute teacher there and is now in the role of SRO for the O'Plaine Campus. He is regarded as one of the leading juvenile officers in Lake County, having served on the executive board of the Illinois Juvenile officers Association, as president of the Lake County Juvenile officers Association and recognized by that group as Lake County Juvenile Officer of the Year.
- **Officer Jim Lazaro:** Nineteen years of law enforcement experience, serves as the SRO for the Almond Campus of Warren Township High School. He has fifteen years of experience as a juvenile officer and coordinates our Teen Court, a peer jury alternative to the criminal justice system for first time and non-violent juvenile offenders.

- **Tami Martin:** Twenty-four years of law enforcement experience, including service as a D.A.R.E. instructor, crime prevention officer and juvenile officer, serves all of the districts as our Public Education Specialist. Her full-time focus is bringing age appropriate training and education to students at every grade level including substance abuse, bullying, anger management, conflict resolution, social media safety and a variety of other safety related topics.
- **Tom Agos:** Thirty-five years law enforcement experience, has served as a full-time Crime Prevention Specialist for twelve years. He gives full-time attention to research and analysis of crime trends and prevention strategies and plays a critical role in bringing appropriate training to the faculty and staff in all of our district's schools.

The school safety team relies on key partnerships with each of our school districts, fire department, Emergency 911 Center and other regional resources.

- **Local School Districts.** The Village of Gurnee has been a leader in school safety for many years, partnering with Warren Township High School in 1995 to place a full-time SRO, four years before the tragedy at Columbine High School. In 2002 that partnership extended to Woodland District 50 and in 2005 to Gurnee District 56. Since 2005 there has been an SRO in each of Gurnee's school districts.

In 2013, our community came together to produce a lock down training video to be shared in the education and emergency response communities. That video, "Attention Students and Staff..." has been shared with over 1,700 police departments and school districts throughout North America. (View the trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lludUhr1DA>)

In addition, our school partners continue to invest in safety and have made substantial facility upgrades throughout the years to resist and deflect attack. The districts partnered to contract the services of a nationally known school safety expert, Kenneth Trump, (www.schoolsecurity.org). Mr. Trump and his team conducted an intensive multi-day, on-site school security assessments of facilities and safety plans.

- **Gurnee Fire Department.** We benefit tremendously from our close working relationship with the highly trained and well prepared Gurnee Fire Department and the network of fire and medical resources that they represent. Tactics are constantly evolving and the most recent advance is "Tactical Medical Response" which brings firefighter/ paramedics teamed with police officers to rescue patients in scenes that have not been fully secured. Gurnee was an early adopter of these tactics and in 2015 conducted a large scale training event at the Woodland Intermediate School. (Media coverage: <http://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/lake-county-news-sun/news/ct-Ins-gurnee-casualty-training-st-0504-20150503-story.html>)
- **Consolidated 911 Center.** Another important partner is our recently upgraded and consolidated 911 center. Located inside the Gurnee Police Facility, this communication hub is where all 911 calls are received and first responders are coordinated. The increased staffing and capacity resulting from the consolidation in July 2017 makes our center more prepared to respond to larger scale incidents than ever before. (Media coverage: <http://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/lake-county-news-sun/news/ct-Ins-gurnee-911-st-1123-20161122-story.html>)
- **Regional Resources.** As strong as our local team is, preparation and a proper response require partnerships with other local, state and federal law enforcement resources. We have plans in place to share resources and information and to provide mutual aid in large scale incidents with the Lake County Sheriff's Office, surrounding municipalities and a number of collaborative teams and task forces. Training and consultation with these partners is an ongoing and essential part of our preparedness.

Prevention Strategies

There are four components to our strategy for preventing critical incidents before they occur. Education, pre-planning, information gathering and threat assessment are all part of an early intervention approach to heading off a crisis before it occurs.

- **Education.** The Gurnee Police Department's Public Education Specialist gives full-time attention to bringing age appropriate messages to every grade level in our schools. This includes topics like problem solving, conflict management/resolution, and bullying to provide alternatives to violence and also provides opportunities for positive, low stress, interactions between students and police officers to improve relationships and the exchange of information.
- **Pre-planning.** Each school facility has a crisis plan that includes a written manual specific to the facility that is maintained on site and at the Gurnee Police Department. The plan and the manuals are updated throughout the year and every summer, the Gurnee Police Department Crime Prevention Specialist and the leadership from each school building evaluate the plan for needed changes to keep up with changing conditions.
- **Information Gathering.** "See something, say something" is the foundation for providing information that leads to a safer school or community. It is essential that threats or suspicious activity be reported to allow a proactive prevention response. Information can be provided through the SRO, a teacher or school administrator, or by calling 911 or anonymously through Text-a-Tip or Lake County Crime Stoppers.

Text-A-Tip provides a 24/7 text-communication system to those needing immediate mental health assistance for themselves or a friend. Members of the community can send a text message to a dedicated number and receive an immediate response from a licensed clinician while remaining completely anonymous. On-call clinicians are responsible for responding appropriately to each communication and for following-up whenever necessary. In the case of a life-threatening condition or criminal activity, emergency responders will be notified. (<http://www.wtyouthservices.com/links-resources>).

- **Threat Assessment.** The value of education and information gathering is realized in the threat assessment process. We use a multi-disciplined approach presented by the Illinois School and Campus Safety Program, derived from U.S Secret Service and FBI recommendations, to evaluate the risk of violence posed by a person. The process brings together a threat assessment team of school faculty, counselors, social workers, law enforcement and others as needed to evaluate risks and take preemptive action.

Response Preparedness

Preparedness is built by bringing our team, partners and resources together to train for a crisis event. Training the faculty, staff and students along with first responders is essential in preparing for an active shooter. From school administrators to students to part-time bus drivers, everyone needs to know how to respond during emergency situations.

- **Students.** Since the attack on Columbine High School in 1999, lockdown drills have become as common as fire drills in our schools. Each drill is an opportunity to train students, teachers and staff on how to secure the building and classrooms from threats inside and outside of the building. These regular events are observed by first responders and critiqued with school staff to provide feedback to further sharpen responses.
- **Faculty and Staff.** The training continues with faculty and staff to include formal training sessions, group discussions and table top exercises on a regular basis. Two full-scale disaster drills have also been staged to simulate and test response systems. Another is currently being planned for May 2018.

- **First Responders.** Since Columbine, tactics for first responding police officers have evolved with the introduction of “rapid deployment response.” Officers of the Gurnee Police Department receive extensive training in best-practice response protocols and practice those skills regularly. Twice annually large-scale training sessions take place in schools and other select locations throughout the Village.

Summary

As a community, we are prepared to respond should the day come where that is needed. It is only through partnerships, communication, education, and repetitive training for our first responders, students and all of the professionals who work in our schools—that we are prepared for the worst. None of these efforts can make us immune from a tragic event, but you can be assured we are taking all these steps to predict and prevent an event from occurring here in the Village of Gurnee.

Sincerely,



Kevin M. Woodside
Chief of Police

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