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SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT**



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Sheriff's Department seeks to expand anti-violence program

Norristown, Pa., (April 29, 2013) – The Montgomery County Sheriff's Department seeks to expand the Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) Program on Monday through the county's public schools, court system and community events. The violence prevention program aims to prevent bullying, youth crime, violence, drug use, and gang involvement.

"The program is specifically designed to avoid future problems and provides positive interaction with our deputy sheriffs," said Sheriff Eileen Whalon Behr. Meeting the goal of Sheriff Behr's commitment to proactive community relations, the program strives to immunize youth against delinquency, youth violence and gang membership. G.R.E.A.T. students develop beliefs and practice behaviors that will help them avoid violence. The Sheriff's Department is the first in the county to implement the program.

"Addressing delinquent behaviors early on is critical and takes a many pronged approach," emphasized the Sheriff. G.R.E.A.T. includes a 13-session middle school curriculum, a six-session elementary school program, summer programming and families training. It is funded by the U.S. Department of Justice – Bureau of Justice Assistance, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Sgt. Patricia M. Haas first introduced the G.R.E.A.T. Program through a pilot program at Eisenhower Middle School in Norristown in September 2012 and has received some interest from other area schools. A critical piece of the program is providing federally funded counseling for families. "In the past, families had to pay for counseling. This can be a hardship for many, making it more difficult to complete the family component. It has a great impact on outcomes of the program," said the sergeant. The G.R.E.A.T. Program highlights have been presented to juvenile probation officers (JPOs) to implement through the court system, in the hope that more families will take advantage of the benefit. The Sheriff's Department also plans to spread the word about the program through community events.

Haas is a 15-year veteran and Dep. Adam Wilson is a three-year veteran of the Montgomery County Sheriff's Department. They are the first two officers in the county to complete 80 hours of course instruction on the G.R.E.A.T. Program.

With the support and guidance of specially trained officers, G.R.E.A.T. students develop beliefs and practice behaviors that will help them avoid violence. They learn to set goals, resist peer pressure, respect differences, resolve conflicts, and understand how gangs negatively impact the quality of life. Most importantly the students learn the importance of becoming responsible members of their communities.

For further information on the G.R.E.A.T. Program please contact the Montgomery County Sheriff's Department by calling 610-574-6497.

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