

QuEd up for Education

People and programs impacting our QCSD community

SRO Lee: QCSD's first line of defense



The hiring of Quakertown Police Officer Bob Lee as the district's School Resource Officer is one of several major steps taken in the last several years to strengthen school security.

School Resource Officer Bob Lee wants parents in the Quakertown Community School District to know that the incidents that led up to the shooting spree at Stoneman Douglas High School are handled quite differently in QCSD.

For one, the previous poor behavior of the gunmen, a former Stoneman Douglas student, would have been addressed well before he killed 17 students and faculty.

"If any of those things would have happened here, I would have went right out to that family," Lee said. "Sometimes I might be paired with a school psychologist. Things would not have been allowed to rise to that level."

Secondly, should an armed individual

make his way into a Quakertown school building, Lee said his job is not to wait outside like deputies from the Broward County Sheriff's Office are reported to have done.

"What happened in Florida is ugly," he said. "Part of my profession dropped the ball. If we get some type of active shooter, I'm ready to deploy. I need to neutralize the threat. That's my primary responsibility."

Lee said the Quakertown Community can expect him to react to an unwanted intruder like the SRO in St. Mary's County, Md., whose quick action is said to have saved student lives.

"It's just common sense," Lee said. "We're trained, and we have a duty to stop that threat. ... The days of waiting up for backup, waiting for the SWAT

team, those days are done."

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Since the 1999 Columbine massacre, schools have been adapting and changing practices to become more safe. While Lee is the district's first line of defense against an outside threat, QCSD has a number of systems in place to prevent entry, and provide quick response to a threat.

Superintendent Dr. Bill Harner pointed out in his Feb. 22 Blog that there are four cornerstones to QCSD security: Critical Incident Planning Committee, Critical Incident Command Team, School Resource Officer program, and training staff and students in the the ALICE protocols for response to critical

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incidents. ALICE stands for alert, lockdown, inform, counter and evacuate.

Harner has developed a strong relationship between the school district and local law enforcement, helping create the district's SRO program.

"A good SRO is priceless for a secondary school," Harner said. "We have insured that our SRO, Bob Lee, has everything he needs to do his job correctly on a daily basis, especially if he needs to respond immediately to a critical incident."

Critical Incident Planning has evolved over Harner's four years as superintendent following strategic planning with law enforcement and other First Responders. "Where we are today is light years ahead of where we were, and we are continuously refining our work, he said.

Schools, which have more cameras, have various other features to make them more secure.

Each year, QCSD has been successful in securing state funds for school safety projects, such as cross-district communication systems and funding for the SRO program.

Grant money has also been used to undertake a district-wide assessment of risk factors that increase the likelihood of problem behaviors among students; comprehensive, district-wide school safety, violence prevention, emergency preparedness and all-hazards plans, and conducting risk assessment and training with local emergency responders.

Prior to the planned student walkouts at QCHS and Strayer Middle School, Harner held several strategy sessions with both Quakertown and Richland police and St. Luke's Emergency Services.

The sessions have become commonplace as both the district and police are actively working to evaluate current systems and helping to design the most up to date training and safety measures. Harner also regularly meets with area superintendents and lawmakers to highlight district needs. Recently, he was among a group of school leaders that made suggestions to state Sen. Bob Mensch.

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A member of the Quakertown Police Dept. for 14 years, Lee doesn't walk the high school halls as he would as if patrolling Broad Street. His role as an SRO can be as much counselor and educator as it is police officer.

"It's different than being on the street in a patrol car, where I'm kind of caged in," he



SRO Bob Lee stands smiling with some of the students that he looks out for each day.

said. "Being on foot here, being able to talk to kids, slowly I can see the trust being increased."

Yes, he's made arrests in the high school, but he's also developed a rapport within the school of 1,700 students in grades 9 through 12. He's given presentations to students and parents about the dangers of drugs and online threats. He also spends time with youngsters in lower grades. Lee was the initial speaker at Strayer Middle School's Career Cafe program, explaining what a career in law enforcement is like.



"I love the job," said Lee, sometimes the first adult students see upon entering the high school in the morning. "I always liked working with kids. They do bring challenges, but we're ready with the solutions.

"This position is so much needed in today's society. It's not about locking up the kids. There are many different angles. The big thing I like is being proactive, being an outreach to the students. My door is always open, and I want the kids to be approachable to me. Being a police officer in this day and age, every once in a while we get a bad rap. I want them to know I'm approachable, I'm human."

Indeed, Lee spearheads the Shop with a Cop event in Upper Bucks, where officers take at-risk youngsters Christmas shopping.

"The idea is to be a role model for these kids, to grab that kid's attention for the night and really gain their trust so that it continues down the road," he said. "It's one of my favorite programs."

Lee also runs the Quakertown First Responders Explorer Post, created in 2015 in conjunction with the Boy Scouts of America. St. Luke's Hospital and the Quakertown Fire Dept. are part of the program, where high school students get a taste of all three emergency disciplines. They receive hands-on training in police and emergency response career fields.

"He's awesome," QCHS senior Olivia Burke said of Lee. "Seeing him in school does make you feel safer. And he's really nice. He seems like he cares about the students."

Quakertown Police Chief Scott McElree explained that Lee, a former juvenile probation officer, has the perfect makeup for an SRO. "He migrates toward having an interest in dealing with youth," McElree said. "It's in his temperament, his desire and his interest."

Oftentimes, McElree said, people have adversarial relationships with police, whether it's from being pulled over for speeding or a more serious interaction. Having Lee develop a rapport with students and faculty supports the community policing model McElree advocates.

"Getting Bob into schools, and having students interact with him about non-police issues, that's what we want," he said. "The better students and faculty can relate to him, the better we can employ the prevention model. And we can provide solutions before the fact. We're seeing a lot of successes."

Lee as an SRO is "a round peg that fits into a round hole," McElree said. "I'm thrilled with the success of the program."

Said Lee, "I'm a deterrent. Someone who wants to cause trouble is going to think twice. There's at least one person armed here that we know of."

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