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For immediate release

Monday, December 12, 2016

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Genoa Township Police Build Relationships with High School Students

Genoa Township Police met throughout November at Westerville Central High School to support students and school officials who have an interest in safety. Two separate safety initiatives, taking place simultaneously, provided an opportunity for Police to connect with students.

“The safety of our students is a top priority,” said Greg Viebranz, Executive Director, Communication and Technology of Westerville City Schools. “We adopt programs deliberately to prepare students to be safe on and off school grounds.”

Created by Genoa Township resident, Jay Woodall, the Bridge Program is a new initiative being piloted to help build respect between officers and youth to prepare them for the real world interactions with police they will inevitably encounter. Students in the Bridge Program took part in insightful discussions with police regarding police policies, tactics, and training when engaging the public and participated in simulations depicting several types of police interactions. In one of the more popular sessions, students were outfitted with faux guns, and switched roles with officers to simulate a traffic stop. Students were able to experience firsthand the potential dangers and challenges officers face when performing routine traffic stops.

“Young people are formulating their ideas about issues from social and other electronic media,” said Jay Woodall, Bridge Program founder. “It is important that we provide positive, real-life interactions with safety officials to counterbalance the sound bites our youth pick up through other outlets. The Program is founded on the idea that both groups (police and students) can learn from one another through positive, respectful, interactions and dialogue.”

Genoa Police also support students as trusted adults through the school’s, “Say Something” initiative, also being piloted. The Say Something initiative is a national effort born out of the Sandy Hook tragedy. Students are educated on recognizing the warning signs of a threat they might see at school or on social media and identify the trusted adult in their life they would go to with information. Genoa Township has a daily presence at Westerville Central High School serving as School Resource Officers, making them likely recipients of this critical information.

“Our deep involvement in schools is an example of our commitment to Community Oriented Policing,” said Genoa Township Chief of Police, Stephen Gammill. “It’s a philosophy of building trust and working together as a community to address the underlying issues associated with safety.”

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