

By SAM HATCHER

After a conversation Wednesday with Wilson County Sheriff Robert Bryan and after hearing a presentation Jan. 17 by two School Resource Officers (SROs) who serve in both local school systems, it's evident that SROs provide much more than security for our schools.

Although providing security may seemingly be their first line of responsibility to many of us, these specially trained and certified law enforcement officers do far more than walk the halls of local schools to deter threats of violence from the outside to students or teachers on the inside.

According to Sheriff Bryan, one of the most common issues SROs are likely to deal with on a daily basis is domestic situations involving custody battles between divorced parents or claims by relatives involving or concerning a student.

These issues, when they spiral to a point that emotions are running high and a threatening situation exists, should not be matters for which teachers or school administrators should have to be the force to intervene. In cases like this, Sheriff Bryan said, a SRO can prove to be extremely valuable.

But the SRO program has a number of other tasks and responsibilities.

Two officers who have been a part of the SRO program locally for a number of years, Sgt. Scott Moore, with the Wilson County Sheriff's Department, and Officer P.J. Hardy, with the City of Lebanon Police Department, told members of the Lebanon Breakfast Rotary yesterday that their service in schools span a great deal of activities and responsibilities.

They acknowledged that they are there to maintain a safe environment but said the role of SROs includes many other areas such as gaining the confidence of students, teachers and administrators; serving as mentors to students; participating in certain extracurricular school activities; keeping a watchful eye for students who may be troubled or have particular needs; and working with teachers and administrators in dealing with social issues among students like bullying or substance abuse.

The point to be made is that this program is far more extensive than just protecting public schools from outside threats.

Sure, as one parent told Sheriff Bryan as we were having our conversation earlier this week, seeing a uniformed law enforcement officer at the front door of a school, when you're dropping your child off in the morning, is a very comforting feeling.

This, particularly since the tragic shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School, has been expressed many times in recent days by parents and teachers alike.

But we should remember that this program provides far more, and we should applaud the fact that the program is being expanded in Wilson County.

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