

**Policing is everyone's job**  
**By Christina Chapman**

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During the last actual class of the Morris Citizen's Police Academy on May 13, Det. Scott Henderson reminded us all of why we took this class-it's not just an officer's job to police our community.

"It's everybody's job, both the police and the citizen's," Henderson said.

He explained that we are the only people who know what is normal in our own neighborhood. A police officer on patrol isn't going to recognize a strange car or person on the street. That's where we come in. It's our responsibility to inform the police.

As simple as this may seem to understand, not everyone realizes this or wants to get involved. So the police organize community programs, such as the Citizen's Police Academy to educate the community on what they can do to keep their towns safe.

The key to educating the community is to start with the young members of society, Henderson said.

Morris police reaches the children through programs such as D.A.R.E., Stranger Danger and bicycle safety.

In Morris, D.A.R.E. is a 12-week program taught to fifth-graders. Morris police has five certified D.A.R.E. officers. It combines the efforts of the police, school and parents to try and prevent drug abuse and violence by educating children on how to recognize and resist pressures, Henderson said.

Stranger Danger is a program taught to much younger kids: preschoolers and kindergartners. I may not be a parent, but as an aunt I can tell you the first time my 5-year-old nephew explained to me what a stranger was and told me to "Never talk to stranger danger," I had never felt so relieved.

"We teach them how to stay away from strangers. Kids will just walk up to anybody," Henderson said.

Most parents believe their children would never talk to a stranger, but Henderson said the reality is that it doesn't take much to sway a child, such as a person with a puppy who claims to need help with the animal. No kid can say no to a puppy.

Police also help with adult programs such as the neighborhood watch. A neighborhood watch is usually started by a couple of residents who want to fix a problem on their block, such as vandalism. The watch is formed, a block captain is chosen and an officer attends the meetings in effort to help get the problem addressed.

But once the vandal stops, the neighborhood watch usually fades away, Henderson said.

"There is currently no neighborhood watch program going in Morris," he said.

The problem is usually solved before the watch falls apart, which is great, Henderson said, but neighborhood watches can also be a preventative method.

The watches do take commitment and a leader, but wouldn't you rather put some work into your neighborhood to keep it safe rather than work to fix it?

Morris police are more than happy to aid in organizing a watch, but they can't do it for you.

For more information call Morris police at (815) 942-2131.

Listen to reporter Christina Chapman discuss Southwest Weekly at 4:40 p.m. Wednesdays on WJOL-AM (1340).