ON THE JOB
CRIMINAL JUSTICE UPDATE

COVER STORY

COPS & KIDS

Richmond Heights P.D. places high value on youth outreach

The Richmond Heights police chief calls his department an idea incubator, but what his team's new youth outreach programs supply is something far more time-tested: community trust.

"If someone does something nice for your mother, you're always going to have a soft spot for them, and I think it's the same way with kids," said Chief Tom Wetzel, who has led the 23-officer department since 2018. "If you do something nice for a child, the parent — even if the parent has a negative view of police — their heart is going to soften a little."

The police department's four banner programs reach out to children in kindergarten through high school and focus on a variety of youth interests.

"We want to make early connections with kids and maintain them," Chief Wetzel said. "The hope is basically to build generational relationships where an officer, who may work for 35 years now, gets to

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> "It's about making the community a better place to live."
>
> — Lt. Denise DeBiase

Left: Elementary student Amari Cloud tries on Lt. Denise DeBiase's vest.

Top: Lt. DeBiase and Chief Tom Wetzel congratulate Kalib Walton, 10, and teacher Meredith Connorton.

Photos courtesy of Richmond Heights Police Department

"Leave no man behind" is a military tradition that probably extends back to the beginning of time.

It is a promise that soldiers make to one another: If you fall on the battlefield, we will bring you home to your country and loved ones.

But as a nation, we have not always made good on this promise. Even after we bring our wounded warriors home, in thousands of cases we have left their minds and spirits trapped on the battlefield, endlessly reliving their traumas.

Many of these veterans try to silence their demons in destructive ways, whether through substance abuse, violence or suicide. Many of them, dogged by addiction, cycle in and out of prisons, jails and homelessness.

This tragic reality is one that first responders throughout Ohio know well.

To change this, I am working with Ohio Supreme Court Justice Sharon Kennedy and former Justice Evelyn Lundberg Stratton to boost local support for veterans. My office's regional directors are contacting law enforcement agencies to find out whether they operate crisis programming for veterans.

Many measures, even simple ones, can make a difference, and any efforts should be suited to the needs of your community.

We encourage agencies to have officers who served display insignia on their uniforms, such as pins, that mark them as military veterans. This sign of solidarity can encourage struggling veterans to open up to these officers, who are sure to better understand them.

Agencies also can add a simple checkbox to paperwork as a way of documenting a person's military service. Such information can identify the person as eligible for specialized resources if the case proceeds through the judicial system. The checkbox also can alert local Veterans Affairs offices of a veteran needing help, especially if that link can be automated or if someone in the agency takes on the responsibility of making the notification.

Officers can be given special training on how to talk with veterans in crisis, deal with post-traumatic stress disorder and recognize warning signs.

Regional Director Contacts

Members of Attorney General Dave Yost's team are working with law enforcement agencies to bolster programming for veterans. To learn more about the need or resources, reach out to the regional director representing your district.

Those agencies with the capacity can form crisis-intervention teams that combine veteran-specific knowledge with informed emergency response.

Some agencies, including the Cincinnati and Dayton police departments, already commit to providing such help. Other agencies have recently decided to dig into the issue, including the Lucas County Sheriff's Office and the Toledo Police and Fire departments.

I salute these agencies and the others performing such an important community service.

My office stands willing to help anyone seeking to join the effort.

Yours,

Dave Yost

Dave Yost
Ohio Attorney General

ON THE JOB
CRIMINAL JUSTICE UPDATE

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Q&A

BETH OWENS

DIRECTOR OF IDENTIFICATION, BUREAU OF CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION

What does BCI's Identification Division do?

Our work centers on Ohio's criminal master files: BCI has more than 6 million records containing charge and demographic details, dispositions, fingerprints and other documents from the courts and state Department of Rehabilitation and Correction. These records make up the foundation of Ohio's Computerized Criminal History (CCH).

The CCH serves the citizens of Ohio through background checks for concealed-handgun licenses, job applications and other requirements. And the system provides vital information to courts and law enforcement — including during traffic stops, with cautions about violent offenders that help keep our officers safe.

We have multiple units, each with a specific area of focus. They include:

- The Criminal Unit is dedicated to ensuring the accuracy of the computerized criminal histories.
- Quality Assurance staff members are assigned a region of the state to assist the courts and law enforcement with correcting errors in submitted records.
- The Fingerprint Examiners compare fingerprint submissions for identification, including when courts request that records be sealed, coroners' offices request identity verifications and poor-quality fingerprints are submitted.
- The Civilian Section processes background checks for citizens, and the staff members have to be experts on the numerous laws that govern how different background checks must be processed.

Bio box

Hometown: "My dad was a minister; I have lived in eight states. 'Hometown' to me is wherever my family is."

Family: married with six children, 19 grandchildren and many more beloved family members, including siblings and her 86-year-old mother

How does your personal history inform your work?

I worked in the Columbus Division of Police's Identification Section for 17 years. I started my career there fingerprinting arrestees, updating records and submitting information to BCI, and was promoted a couple of times. In 2007, the Franklin County Sheriff's Office recruited me to lead the jail's Identification Unit. I did that for 11 years before coming to BCI.

My husband was a Columbus police officer and a sergeant in the Narcotics Bureau for 20 years; through my family and my larger law enforcement family, I experienced the importance of the Ohio CCH in helping officers and investigators to stay safe.

So how many background checks does the Identification Division run a year?

The Civilian Section completed 1.6 million background checks in 2019, and we also added more than 1,000 sex offenders and 100 arson offenders to state registries. The point is helping to ensure the safety of our vulnerable — children, patients and residents of nursing facilities. Those who work with these groups must pass background checks to help prove they can be trusted.

What first got you interested in a career in criminal justice?

I always wanted to make a difference in some way. When I met my husband, he was a Columbus police officer assigned to the Detective Bureau. I was intrigued by the judicial processes from arrest to court. I must add, I did not want to be an officer. The job in the Identification Section came open, and it was a great match.

Victims often counter expectations

Nationwide Children's doctors will share their experiences in keynote presentation

The first child victim of sex trafficking seen by Dr. Jennifer Tscholl was neither grateful to have been saved by the FBI agents on her case, nor ready to admit that she had been victimized.

"In my mind, I was envisioning what the movies show — like they rescued this child, and she is being brought here and is going to be so thankful," said the child-abuse pediatrician who works at Nationwide Children's Hospital's Center for Family Safety and Healing.

"But I couldn't have been further from reality," Tscholl said, "because this child was very distrustful. She wanted nothing to do with any of the people who were there."

The long line of trafficking-related patients she has treated since has driven home the fact that they don't easily self-identify as victims. Much like women suffering domestic violence or children who have been sexually abused, trafficking victims aren't typically forthcoming about what is happening; they need time to realize they want help, said Tscholl, who will share her insights this month at the Attorney General's second annual Human Trafficking Summit.

At the Center for Family Safety and Healing — housed in the same building as special units of the Columbus Division of Police and Franklin County Children Services — Tscholl's team works to mitigate the risk for kids who, mostly, don't say they experience human trafficking but show a significant number of vulnerabilities.

Those red flags may include a history of substance use, running away, multiple sexual partners and sexually transmitted infections.

"When we talk to trafficking survivors when they are identified later in life, most of them say that they started doing this when they were still children, so we know we have the opportunity to identify these kids earlier," Tscholl said. "Studies have found that 88% of victims say they were brought in for medical care during their period of exploitation."

The Center for Family Safety and Healing is developing special screenings and other methods to help medical professionals recognize the plight faced by such children, even if they're just in for regular checkups. Tscholl said the center is also working on how to build trust and do right by these young patients.

Dr. Jennifer Tscholl

Dr. Kelly Kelleher

HUMAN TRAFFICKING SUMMIT 2021

Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost's Human Trafficking Summit

What: Online experience with three feature presentations and 15 workshop options

When: 8:45 a.m.-4 p.m. Jan. 14, 2021

Cost: $10

Register: www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov/Human-Trafficking-Summit

Dr. Kelly Kelleher, a pediatrician at Nationwide Children's Hospital's Abigail Wexner Research Institute who studies young people at risk of behavioral and mental health issues, sees the need.

"We have to come up with new solutions," he said. "The alternative is people end up on the streets using drugs, being trafficked and with very high rates of suicide. As a result, we end up with more people dead and more people in prison — and that doesn't even count the health consequences that Jennifer deals with."

Kelleher, who will take part in the summit's keynote presentation with Tscholl, came to work on human trafficking after a research interest in prisons led him to homeless youth and foster kids.

"For me, it's a research project and a public advocacy issue because it's such an important topic," he said. "So many of these children are coming from trafficking situations or being solicited for trafficking."

Kelleher is running a large, randomized study seeking to determine whether providing housing to young people (ages 18-24 because they must be old enough to sign home-rental contracts) helps them avoid using drugs and being trafficked. He hopes to secure a grant for his next study topic: runaway intervention.

Both homeless and runaway youths are at extreme risk of falling victim to sex trafficking.

"So many people think of trafficking as moral failings," Kelleher said. "Moral failings of the johns on the street, moral failings of people trafficking somebody and also of the young people themselves. But in reality, this is a system problem. This is about how we treat people. ... This is about what we do when our education system fails them, when our foster care system doesn't move them on to the next step.

"These are systemic issues that people with influence and policymakers have the opportunity to change," he said.

Tscholl agreed and said systems and communities need to expand their understanding of human trafficking.

"Thinking it's only kids who don't have parental support who face a trafficking risk is misguided," she said. "All kids have some kind of vulnerability, especially teens who really want to fit in at this time of their life, and traffickers will exploit that."

During their presentation, the doctors expect to address human trafficking myths, including how victims become involved in trafficking. Preventing a problem, after all, depends on truly understanding how it happens and how it continues.

"The way that myths propagate across communities — you see people saying on social media, 'I was at a store and there was someone clearly following me, and they were trying to take my young child to traffic them' — people think they should look out for a kidnapper van," Tscholl said. "I'm not saying kids don't get kidnapped — these stories are concerning in their own right — but having people across communities only worried about strangers kidnapping their children doesn't help prepare families to monitor what the trafficking risks actually are.

"It's not going to help us prevent kids from becoming victims if families and children don't know that the overwhelming majority of victims know their traffickers."

Forensic scientist Nicole Hall is part of the Laboratory Division, which recently added mitochondrial DNA testing.

BCI adds Cold Case Unit, DNA and tech upgrades

The Attorney General's Bureau of Criminal Investigation has made some important changes to better serve its law enforcement partners.

The Cold Case Unit was established last year to help local departments take a fresh look at old, unsolved homicides and sexual assaults. It is a team-driven effort: Each re-examination involves the police department or sheriff's office where the case originated as well as members of multiple divisions at BCI. They include:

- Special agents, veteran investigators dedicated solely to the unit.
- Forensic scientists from BCI's Lab Division, who bring advanced DNA testing and other tools to the table.
- Criminal Intelligence Unit analysts, who establish case evidence and timelines and use investigative genealogy methods to help identify suspects.

"Individually, the Laboratory or Criminal Intelligence or special agents had already been working cold cases for agencies," said Roger Davis, special agent supervisor and leader of the Cold Case Unit. "But an agent might get called out on an officer-involved shooting, and everything they had done on a cold case would get pushed to the back burner — and rightfully so. The Cold Case Unit gives personnel the opportunity, time and multidisciplinary team to prioritize these cases."

As part of the initiative, the Laboratory Division has two sexual assault-focused projects through which they reach out to local law enforcement agencies. Project SEND highlights older sexual assault cases in which new technological advancements could mean new leads, and Project SAK highlights cases in which, No. 1, a DNA profile was developed during the bureau's previous sexual assault evidence kit testing push and, No. 2, additional investigative or laboratory strategies could help bring the perpetrator to justice.

More information is available at www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov/CCU.

In another big development, the Laboratory Division has brought online mitochondrial DNA testing for use in cases involving missing persons or unidentified remains. This important tool can yield clues in cases where traditional DNA testing fails due to factors such as environmental degradation.

That is because traditional testing analyzes relatively fragile DNA from a cell's nucleus, which can be easily damaged by environmental factors. But DNA from a cell's mitochondria is hardier; plus, there might be 100 to 10,000 copies per human cell, compared with the two nuclear DNA copies.

Mitochondrial DNA testing is made possible by a technique called massively parallel sequencing, which allows millions of fragments of DNA from a single sample to be sequenced in unison rather than one at a time. Battelle Memorial Institute worked with BCI to perfect the process.

Ohio is just the second state crime lab — after California – to utilize the massively parallel sequencing.

Also in the works are **a pair of technological upgrades that will add power and efficiency to integral BCI-operated systems**.

The first will take the Ohio Law Enforcement Gateway (OHLEG) into its next generation. The system, used by law enforcement agencies statewide, last had a significant update in 2013 and, as a result, had become outdated and fallen behind the FBI's preferred records management system platform.

"Law enforcement had requested that we add various tools to OHLEG over the years, but we didn't have the capability or money to do so," said Jill Small, director of BCI's OHLEG Division. "Each one would have cost a lot of money. But under the upgrade, we were able to get a lot of those items checked off at one time."

The new Swift Protect Records Management System offers not only incident reporting but also a complete case management system, specialized crash report module and jail booking component. The system, which also offers additional new tools, was chosen because it is known for being flexible and easy to use.

The second upgrade will bring important efficiencies to the system that supports Ohio's Computerized Criminal History database of more than 6 million records, which officers on the street rely on every day.

BCI's Identification Division, which is responsible for cataloging criminal records and running background checks, now uses the 20-year-old Automated Biometric Identification System (ABIS), a combination of the Multi-Biometric Identification System and the criminal history system. But it, too, had fallen behind recommended standards.

The $25 million replacement, called the Ohio Biometric Identification System (OBIS), is set to come online midyear. It will add important system efficiencies and power, creating a more stable tool that retrieves data more rapidly.

The project will fully digitize BCI's background check service, including turning more than 3 million paper criminal records (containing 12 million documents) into digital records.

Further, **BCI has tweaked its internal structure** to ensure units that cross regions of the state, such as the Officer-Involved Critical Incident Response Team and the Crime Scene Unit, are more unified and get the same training. A new Special Victims Unit has brought victim-centered investigations under its umbrella, including crimes against children, child abductions and missing children; human trafficking, both labor and sex; financial or physical abuse of the elderly; and adult sexual assaults.

"We want our organization to reflect the realities of our priority investigations and duties," said Heinz Von Eckartsberg, assistant superintendent of BCI. "Anything we can do to make sure we work better for our partners — anything we can do to make sure we better protect the people of Ohio — we will do."

Continued from Page 1

know kids and then could actually meet their children, too."

In short, the department wants to inspire long-term trust.

Throughout Ohio, other law enforcement agencies are likewise making investments — in ways simple and more complex — with the long view in mind.

"It's about making the community a better place to live," said Lt. Denise DeBiase, a 25-year veteran of the Richmond Heights department who spent 18 years as a DARE officer and now supervises multiple programs for teens.

"If more officers realized how much they can impact their community through youth outreach, we'd have so much more compliance in society," she said. "People would be like, 'You know what, if this officer is like Officer Denise, then maybe I should listen to them because I know it's going to go OK.' "

A proactive approach

Richmond Heights Elementary is the first school that Principal Elizabeth Boyd has worked at where police officers initiate programming and regularly stop in just to connect, she said.

"Our police don't come around just to keep the peace," she said. "They are proactive in helping students to become productive citizens, and they recognize those who do well. It makes a difference."

That difference has fostered a lot of good will among students, parents, public officials and other residents of the community of 11,000 northeast of Cleveland. It also has drawn recognition for the police department, which won "Agency of the Month" honors in July from the Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police and Law Enforcement Foundation.

Richmond Heights takes pride in its efforts and hopes these programs can serve as models for other agencies nationwide looking to deepen youth outreach:

Teen Ambassador Club

Through this club, Richmond Heights High School students interested in leadership learn about the public servants who power their community and how to be of service.

Lt. DeBiase, who runs the program, said the idea was suggested by Lindsay Carr, the northeast regional liaison for the Attorney General's Office.

"She came in one day and said, 'We're trying to get programs started across the state to give teens opportunities and positive interaction with police,'" Lt. DeBiase said. "And I said, 'Sign us up.'"

She worked with school officials to start the program, through which the students organize clothes and food drives and visit the police station, city offices and local courts. Once the COVID-19 pandemic wanes, ride-alongs with officers are planned.

At one of the first Cop Scouts meetings, Sgt. Todd Leisure showed kids how to make pop can stoves, which they used to make hot chocolate.

"It's a very positive experience when you're actually seeing something and you're not on the wrong side of the law," Lt. DeBiase said. "You're on the right side of the law."

The club benefits all involved: The students learn real-life lessons and get a strong entry for their resumes or college applications, and the police department gets a lift from young people who understand how law enforcement works and can share that knowledge with others in the community.

Cop Scouts

Cop Scouts was one of those new ideas brought to Chief Wetzel that he embraced.

Sgt. Todd Leisure, a retired Marine and a former Cub Scouts leader, proposed this blend of Police Explorers and the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. The 9- to 12-year-olds who participate learn life and outdoors skills, police awareness and team building.

In one of the first meetings, Sgt. Leisure taught the kids (and their parents, who hang around) how to make mini stoves out of soda cans heated on a campfire.

"People are excited, and they're actually donating money, which is remarkable," Chief Wetzel said. "They're already paying their taxes. For them to dig into their pocket again tells you they believe in what we're doing."

Plans for the future include getting uniforms and applying for grant funding.

"These kids are going to form friendships with not only their fellow Cop Scouts but also the police officers," Chief Wetzel said. "And it's a great chance for the officers to give back to their communities. This is really a true calling to want to do this."

Tip Our Badge

Tip Our Badge gives the Richmond Heights police a starring role in helping high-performing students, and their families, celebrate their accomplishments.

For this program, the department works with the primary and secondary Richmond Heights schools to recognize a student for academic excellence every two weeks. Teachers can nominate anyone for standout work, such as a science fair winner, a student who excels on a project or one with a high grade-point average.

The police department created a certificate and tapped local businesses to donate small rewards, such as restaurant vouchers and movie theater tickets.

"Because we are remote schooling, the police department brings those rewards to the student's

home," said Boyd, the principal at Richmond Heights Elementary. "They create positive experiences for the child and the whole family."

The city celebrates the student winner on the marquee in front of City Hall, and Chief Wetzel conducts a brief interview with the student — which, with parental permission, is posted on Facebook.

"We've got a pretty big, growing Facebook page," said the chief, who created Tip Our Badge. "It's fun because it gives students the chance to have family members come and say 'nice job' — this generation is very big on social media — and the outreach for us is amazing."

People from as far away as California and Vietnam have visited the Facebook page to cheer on young relatives who were honored.

"We try to communicate on our Facebook page every single day in some fashion, which our community really likes," the chief said. "So when you get people coming to congratulate a student, they see — or maybe they get curious about — what else we have going on."

> "The artwork, No. 1, is beautiful, and every day our officers see these works and are reminded of their connection to the children in our community."
>
> **— Chief Tom Wetzel**

Police School Art Competition

Chief Wetzel conceived of the annual Police School Art Competition after realizing that most youth outreach programs focus on kids who excel in sports or academics.

"I wanted to connect with the artistic children in our schools," he said.

So his department purchased frames and enlisted help from the high school art teacher. She provided 30 works, which were spread out in a conference room for officers to judge. The winning artists were invited to an awards ceremony, the newspaper covered it, and the art now hangs all over the station.

"The artwork, No. 1, is beautiful," said the chief, who chose a favorite for his office. "And every day our officers see these works and are reminded of their connection to the children in our community."

The many benefits

Principal Boyd wouldn't hesitate to encourage law enforcement agencies thinking about starting or expanding youth outreach programs.

"I would say do it — make the effort to build those relationships because it definitely helps students," she said. "They feel safer in school, safer even in their community, and we can work together to start to turn around that feeling that when police show up, that's a bad thing. It's not."

Boyd told a story about a student who got into trouble outside of school, requiring intervention from school leaders and police.

"Because of the relationship we already had, we were able to work with that student and turn some things around," she said. "The family was more receptive because they knew the officer. She wasn't seen as a threat. She was seen as a positive."

Some students who get to know the officers, Chief Wetzel said, will admire their strength and character as well as their exciting job, and decide that they, too, want to do police work when they grow up — effectively making youth outreach an important, if long-term, recruitment tool.

"Officer Donald Stocum, who we hired about six years ago, was one of my DARE students," Lt. DeBiase said. "In fact, he was in my first DARE class, in 1998, when he was in fifth grade."

In an effort to collect empirical data to prove that the programming produces results (beyond Stocum), Richmond Heights sent a survey to several hundred community members. Of those who responded, 80% gave the department high marks for increasing trust between students and officers.

"Most people, when they hear what we're doing, don't need any studies and data," Chief Wetzel said. "You can just tell: These are kind acts that are going to resonate with people."

And he believes all law enforcement agencies, no matter their size, should carry out youth outreach.

"This idea that 'we're too busy,' I don't buy that. I've been hearing it for 33 years," Chief Wetzel said. "If you want to make it happen, you'll find the time. And if we're going to build bridges of trust for the long term, we've got to do it one girder at a time.

"That happens through programs like these."

Big after-school program fulfills county-wide need

Ten years ago, the Montville Police Department took over a small after-school program focused on a single apartment complex in Medina.

Today, that program — now called the Medina County Police Activities League (MCPAL) — is a county-wide collaboration with its own board serving more than 500 students in five school districts (when COVID isn't raging).

Officers from the Montville, Medina, Brunswick, Medina Township and Wadsworth police departments and the Medina County Sheriff's Office participate in the crime-prevention programming.

"I think any officer who gets into this field does it to make a positive impact on someone else's life," said Sheriff Terry Grice, who took office Jan. 4 after eight years as Montville police chief. "There are very few professions where you can do that, and this is one of them. When officers see the positive influence they can have on kids, they realize what they're doing really does matter."

Programming Director Rebecca Byrne said MCPAL offers free after-school programming, including games, art activities, music enrichment (such as steel drum- and guitar-playing) and snacks; field trips to places such as Cavaliers and Monsters (hockey) games, Browns training camps, Cedar Point and the Great Lakes Science Center; an Explorers program for teens interested in becoming law enforcement officers; basketball and soccer leagues; and, once leaders recognized how dependent some kids are on the after-school snacks, a food bank that delivers to homes.

Officers work with kids who attend school in their districts, said Byrne, who was a Montville Police Department civilian employee but moved to the sheriff's office with Grice.

"Some of the magic of MCPAL is when you bring this diverse group of kids together with police officers and everyone just has fun," she said.

Another outreach effort that moved with Sheriff Grice's team is the Take Control Teen Driving Program.

It is advanced, or defensive, driving for teenagers funded in part by families from Medina County who have lost children in car accidents, the sheriff said.

"Although we operate both of these programs, we couldn't do them without all of our other law enforcement partners," Sheriff Grice said. "They really are a collaborative effort to make our county a better place to live."

Find out more at OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov/OnTheJob.

Mark Your Calendar

Trafficking summit 2021

The Ohio Attorney General's Human Trafficking Summit will be held virtually on Jan. 14. Reserve your spot at www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov/Human-Trafficking-Summit.

Keeping you up-to-date

Attorney General Dave Yost's office tracks proposals introduced in the Ohio legislature to reform policing in the state at www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov/PoliceIssues.

The webpage also honors the law enforcement officers who died on the job in the past three years.