

Officer Joanne Ballard

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Ballard is New Reserve Officer

By Sally Applegate/Correspondent

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Georgetown Police Dispatcher Joanne Ballard took on some new responsibilities last week. Following her May 2006 graduation from a 26-week course at the North Eastern Regional Police Institute in Tewksbury, she was hired as a reserve officer with the Georgetown force.

Police Chief James Mulligan called Ballard “a good addition to the force.”

“She broke in as a dispatcher with us, then expressed an interest in becoming an officer,” said Mulligan. “She took physical fitness and psychological exams, and passed an extensive background check. She topped every exam she took, and that’s why we hired her.”

Georgetown’s newest reserve officer was getting ready to go out on her first solo shift Friday night. Arriving at work, she had to find room on her small waistline for a battery of police equipment — a flashlight, baton, portable radio, weapon, two magazines of ammo and pepper spray.

She considers having to endure pepper spray the toughest part of her training as a police officer.

“The worst part of my training was being pepper-sprayed,” said Officer Ballard. “It was worse than having children. It took me 12 hours to recover. My eyes looked like tomatoes. My eyes were tearing when I was asleep, and the tears were burning the skin on my hand.”

Ballard has this warning for anyone thinking of taking actions that might force an officer to use pepper spray on them:

“It blinds you. It hurts you. It stops you.”

Ballard’s next step before her Friday shift was inspecting the cruiser to make sure all the police equipment was loaded — the defibrillator, flare, stop sticks, animal snare, flotation device, medical bag, traffic cones, crime scene tape, shovel, rubber gloves, school emergency kit, fire extinguisher, blanket, camera, two sets of handcuffs and a laptop computer.

On her extensive checklist for the cruiser was making sure the radio, lights and siren were in working order, as well as the emergency light bar that diverts traffic around an accident scene.

A heavy rainstorm was moving through Georgetown as Ballard started her first-ever solo patrol.

“It rained almost every night of my training,” said Ballard. “My training officer Brian Neeley called me and said, ‘Good luck tonight. I know you’re working because it’s raining.’”

Inspections finished, she headed down East Main Street to check for speeders or possibly unregistered or uninsured vehicles.

“We can run license plates from our cruisers,” said Ballard.

Ballard attended Salem State College with the thought of becoming a teacher, but three years ago responded to an opening for a night dispatcher at the Georgetown Police Department.

“Dispatcher Mary Ricker was retiring,” said Ballard. “It was an opportunity for me. She said I could have the job as long as I put the Christmas tree up every year.”

Ballard has five brothers and two sisters and said they all remain close.

“I’m big into family,” said Ballard.

She grew up in Newburyport, became a certified substitute teacher, worked in the Amesbury school system for two years, and spent eight years working for Turning Point in Newburyport.

Ballard lives in Amesbury with her 15-year-old daughter, Miranda, and 13-year-old son, Kyle.

“They’re both good students,” said Ballard. “They’re nice kids.”

She says her main interest outside of police work is spending quality time with her children.

“I like to be involved with the kids’ activities,” said Ballard. “I coached my daughter’s sports teams for the past five years. She played junior varsity field hockey this year. My son switched from hockey to football this year.”

Heading out on patrol Friday, Ballard said, “I’m ready. I’m anxious.”

For Chief Mulligan, his reserve officers and his full-time officers all get the same treatment, he said.

“They all take the same risks.”