

Detective James Rodden



Blue in Schools: School Resource Officer Hired

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Officer Jim Rodden just accepted the only job that would draw him away from teaching.

Rodden, a veteran reserve officer for the Georgetown Police Department, was recently named the town's first school resource officer.

Rodden is no stranger to the halls of education. Up until this summer he was a teacher at Beverly High School, where he worked for 11 years. (Rodden is a Beverly native.) Before that, he worked in the Chelsea school system.

He also coached lacrosse for eight years, as an assistant coach in Beverly and head coach at Medford High School.

Rodden got his start in police work as a reserve officer in Wenham. He moved to Georgetown five years ago, and around that time he worked a detail with several Georgetown officers. They encouraged him to apply as a reservist in Georgetown, and he was soon accepted. He has juggled both jobs, plus teaching, ever since.

"Between the two towns the summers were even busier than the school year," said Rodden.

Now, however, he is able to focus completely on his new role.

Georgetown is one of four communities in the state to receive the grant (penned by Master Patrolman Donald Cudmore) that puts Rodden in the schools full-time.

During his first year, the federal grant will pay 75 percent of Rodden's salary. This lessens to half in the second year, and a quarter in the third. The town is committed to a fourth year with a school resource officer to obtain the grant.

Rodden will also enhance the size of the force, however. During school vacations he is on the road as an additional patrolman.

Rodden's role in the schools will be twofold. Primarily, he's there to, simply put, provide a police presence.

"This is the same sort of stuff you'd handle out in the patrol vehicle," said Rodden. "The chief (James Mulligan) has been very clear that this is a law enforcement position first."

The other aspect of his job will be less tangible but no less important.

"There is a definite need for a trusting connection between the police department and the school department," said Rodden.

By having a familiar face in the buildings, the hope is that students and staff will have someone they know they can turn to when necessary.

On a more down-to-earth matter, Rodden plans to assist with the traffic situations outside Perley and Penn Brook elementary schools.

Further down the road, Rodden can envision taking a more active role at the school. He taught street law for a period in Beverly, and organized a speaker series against drunk driving.

"It gave the students a view of what happens when they make bad decisions," said Rodden. The series concluded with a speaker who lost her son in a drunk driving accident.

The use of school resource officers is on the rise, said Rodden. More and more towns are finding the funds to bring in an officer ever since the Columbine shootings. In speaking with other school resource officers, Rodden has found the position to be a welcome addition in the towns that make use of it.

While job duties are, obviously, very different, Rodden said there is one fact that ties teaching and police work together.

"Both jobs provide instant satisfaction," he said. At the end of a given day, he said, he can see the effect of the work he has done on the faces of the people he helped. "There's not too many jobs you can work your eight hours, or so, look at what you did and see a difference in someone's life."