

Police in the School: Revisited.

By: Ayla Graney



From left to right: Mike Merwin, Randy Roy, Ayla Graney, Officer John Sotile, Officer Harold McClellan, Sierra Bailey, and Molly Hyde.

In an earlier issue of the Panther Post, Reilly Holbriiter and Kassidy Hitt debated a topic that had been circulating the gossip streams among students and staff: Police in the School; Pro or Con? The girls took opposing sides on the issue, debating the necessity of having police officers in the school. While we heard from two sides, there was still one side that we hadn't heard from: the Hoosick Falls police officers themselves.

On Tuesday, November 8th, the editors of the Panther Post were greeted warmly by two of our Village's officers, Harold McClellan and John Sotile. These two officers wanted to make it clear that their intentions are not to come into the school and arrest individuals, but rather to form a closer relationship with the students, and thus, the community. Said Officer McClellan, "We would like to change the culture of how we are perceived." McClellan related stories of parents warning their children that if they (the children) did not follow the rules, the police officer would arrest them. This is, unfortunately, how they are seen by many, and it is a perception that Officers McClellan and Sotile would like to remedy.

Oftentimes, children are raised under the assumption that the intentions of police officers are solely to catch people doing bad things and stop criminals. This assumption sticks with many throughout his or her lifetime, as made apparent by the reactions of individual students to the presence of police officers in the high school. The main goal of Officers McClellan and Sotile is to change this point of view.

Both officers are motivated not by anger or vengeance, but by the willingness and drive to serve a community. Officer McClellan enjoys serving Hoosick Falls, and in fact was a graduate of the second class of HFCS. His family has lived here for generations, and his grandfather ran a local coal and ice company, and was head of the highway department. Clearly Officer McClellan's Hoosick Falls roots run deep. His desire to join the police force resulted from an unstated life changing event, that left him wanting to make a difference in his community. Officer Sotile, while not from Hoosick Falls, was born and raised in a local community and had aspired to be a police officer since he was a child. After working in his family business for a number of years, he followed his dream and became an even more involved member of the community. As an indication of how hard working he is, Officer Sotile continues to work in his family business as well as maintaining the life of a police officer. When asked if

he wishes he had become a police officer earlier in life, he said, “I have no regrets [about my choice] at all.”

Senior Randy Roy sat quietly throughout the first half of the discussion, but was brought in when it was discovered that he has a strong interest in joining the police department after college. McClellan, Sotile, and Roy then discussed many things, including the presence of police officers in the high school. A question was asked of the officers “what would you do if you caught students smoking in the bathroom?” To begin with, McClellan is surprised that students smoke. “This is the educated generation,” he said, “I can’t believe anyone smokes. It boggles my mind.” Before answering, the officers bounced the question to Roy; what would he do in that situation. Randy responded that he would likely send the students down to the principal’s office. McClellan and Sotile weren’t quite sure; “I might just ask the student ‘What are you doing?’” said Sotile, adding that “there would definitely be a wet pack of cigarettes though.” The point is, neither officer is interested in getting students in trouble; they are far more concerned with being seen as helpful members of the community, one that students can turn to and trust.

Roy notes that he thinks it’s a “good idea” to have the police in school. After all, it has been made clear that their intentions are not to bust open a locker and search your belongings; they are not here to catch smokers in the bathroom. Instead, they are here to provide another avenue for students who are seeking for someone to talk to; they are here, as members of the community, to form better relationships and interact, in a healthy way, with the students and staff of Hoosick Falls Central School.