

SRO officers play a key role in Investigating School Threats

As many of you know, the start of the school year was marked by a series of threatening messages directed towards our schools. The Clarence School District, the Town of Clarence, and the Erie County Sheriff's Office took these threats seriously and responded promptly. The School District implemented all necessary precautions to safeguard students. At the same time, Sheriff John Garcia ensured an increased police presence across all school buildings, including deploying the Sheriff's SWAT team, until each threat was thoroughly investigated.

Our School Resource Officers (SROs) worked tirelessly, attending school events and maintaining security. I was updated daily by the School District, our SROs, and Sheriff Garcia on the situation, while Clarence Central School District Superintendent Dr. Matt Frahm kept parents informed as new information emerged. By the end of the week, both the New York State Police and the FBI were involved in addressing the ongoing threats. The Town of Clarence relies on the Erie County Sheriff's Office and the State Police for law enforcement. At Friday night's football game, alongside our SROs, there was a significant presence of Sheriff Deputies and State Troopers. Although no arrests have been made concerning the most severe threats, several strong suspects have been questioned.

Recently, the school district and the town added a third SRO. When the SRO program was introduced a few years ago, no one anticipated how essential their role would be in addressing serious incidents like recent weeks. In addition to the duties Dr. Frahm outlined in his *Clarence Bee* column, one of the most crucial roles of the SROs is acting as the school district's point of contact when outside law enforcement agencies are involved. This responsibility fell to school personnel in previous years, who often needed more time and resources due to their other school-related obligations. The involvement of our SROs has been instrumental in this case, as their fact-finding across several school buildings provided Sheriff's investigators with crucial information that helped narrow the search for those responsible for the threatening messages.

I want to extend my gratitude to School Resource Officers Ballow, Dzierba, and Pezzino for their exceptional dedication to the safety of our students. Thank you also to Sheriff Garcia and his deputies for their considerable efforts and long hours, which swiftly led to the identification of strong suspects. The swift actions of the Sheriff's Office, coupled with consistent updates to the School District, helped ease tensions among parents and students.

In other news, the 14th annual Meet in the Center merchants' Fallfest was a resounding success and continues to grow each year. Event planner Deborah Bohm and her committee nearly doubled the activities, and over a thousand residents took advantage of the perfect weather, strolling through Clarence Center streets, visiting friends, and supporting local businesses and vendors. With the Clarence Center Pocket Park now open, there is potential for next year's Fallfest to expand further along Goodrich Road, perhaps incorporating activities at the park. Many organizations and volunteers are to be thanked for their contributions to the Fallfest. As always, special recognition goes to the Clarence Center Volunteer Fire Company for ensuring the event's success and safety.

As fall is approaching, and leaves are falling; please make sure you keep the leaves and your brush on the grass and not in the streets for the safety of all. The Highway Department is still following the brush schedule through November weather permitting and just began leaf pickup too. Please keep brush and leaves in separate piles. The schedule and further information for the zone pickups are available on our website.