

MVTHS School Resource Officer serves as positive role model for students

By VANESSA WELCH

vanessa.welch@register-news.com
MT. VERNON —

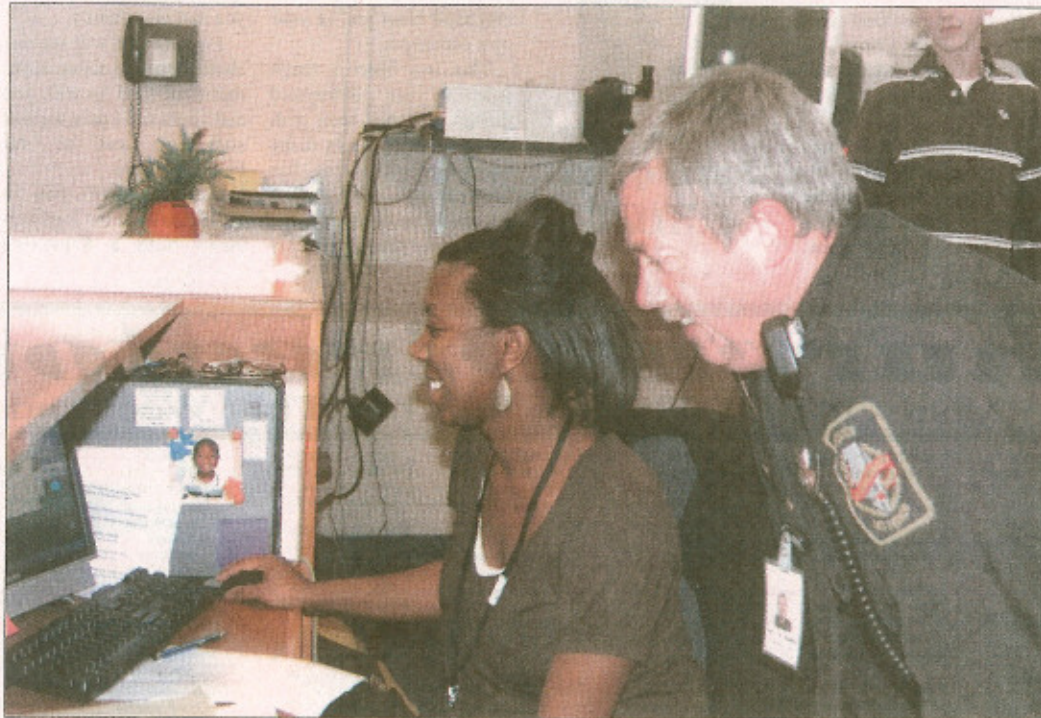
Whether Sgt. Jim Hawkins is participating in high school activities or talking with students one-on-one, the School Resource Officer for Mt. Vernon Township High School addresses campus issues while serving as a positive role model for students.

Starting his 20th year with the Mt. Vernon Police Department, Hawkins said he started serving as SRO six years ago, and has since enjoyed working with students and teachers on a daily basis.

"Chief Mendenall was familiar with the SRO program around the country and he thought it would be beneficial to have a program here at the high school," Hawkins said. "Through the interviewing process I was fortunate to be selected for the position."

As an authoritative resource, Hawkins said his experience with the police department helps to enhance what students learn in classrooms.

"I work with teachers when topics lend themselves to in-class presentations," Hawkins said. "I have helped with the Bill of Rights, Drivers Education, and I've talked to health classes about alcohol/drug abuse and zero



School Resource Officer Sgt. Jim Hawkins works closely with employees at Mt. Vernon Township High School including Nakeisha Lash. As a resource for parents, staff, administration and students regarding law enforcement, Lash said, "Having this program keeps the kids in line and it gives them someone to talk to confidentially."

VANESSA WELCH/REGISTER-NEWS

tolerance."

Hawkins said he also works closely with students outside of classes and recently helped with Youth and Government's mock trials at the Jefferson County Courthouse. In past years, Hawkins served as producer

for Theatre for Kids and helped with makeup for Operetta productions.

As a resource for parents and guardians, Hawkins noted he also builds relationships with them in part to help prevent crime on campus and keep open lines of

communication.

"I think the biggest concern they've always had is the openness of the campus," Hawkins said. "Some of the students probably aren't ready for the responsibility that comes with that. Parents don't always know what their

kids are doing — they always think, 'Well they're at school.' Sometimes when they leave at lunch they're not at school."

When students decide to leave campus for lunch, Hawkins said some engage in dangerous activities as two sides of the campus are bor-

dered by railroad tracks. By driving safe and not trespassing on railroad property, Hawkins said accidents can be prevented.

During his time spent at the high school, Hawkins said he has discovered that a variety of activities and sports exist for students outside of the classroom.

"There are a lot of good things that go on here at Mt. Vernon High School," Hawkins said. "There is a wide variety of activities for students to get involved with. Unfortunately people too often focus on the negative things. There are a lot of good teachers here and a majority of the students are outstanding young adults."

Hawkins noted he is gratified when "students feel confident to come up and talk to me about various things in their life."

Overall, through working at the high school Hawkins said he hopes to emphasize positive aspects of students to the entire community.

"I personally believe that teenagers all get clumped into the same category of being rude and disrespectful," Hawkins said. "I think a large majority of them don't fit into that category. I use this as an opportunity to let others know a different side of them."