

Program 'dares' students to stay away from drugs

By Barbara Ann Homick
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — It's much easier to instruct fifth- and sixth-graders about the dangers of drugs than it is to arrest adults for drug-related crimes, according to Monroe County Deputy Sheriff Edward Ramsperger.

The deputy sheriff of the department's Community Services Unit acknowledged that the main goal of the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) program is to educate young people about the dangers of drugs in order to prevent them from becoming addicted to controlled substances later in life.

Several law enforcement agencies have offered the drug-awareness program at Rochester-area schools. Officers with the Irondequoit Police Department conducted the program at St. Thomas the Apostle, St. Cecilia, St. James, St. Ambrose and Christ the King schools this year.

In addition, the Monroe County Sheriff's Department offers D.A.R.E. to 15 schools county-wide, including five diocesan schools. The sheriff's department conducted fall sessions, which run from October to January, at such Rochester-area parishes as St. Pius the X, Good Shepherd and St. Louis.

Currently, St. Theodore's and St. John of Rochester schools are wrapping up their spring D.A.R.E. sessions, which run from January to May. Officials at the sheriff's department also noted that several other Catholic schools have expressed interest in implementing the program next fall.

Ramsperger said the cooperation among the schools helps make the D.A.R.E. program a reality.

"We appreciate the people (school administrators) here who give up 45 minutes for 17 weeks. It really takes a hole out of their curriculum," Ramsperger acknowledged.

Although Sister Elaine Englert, SSJ, principal at St. Theodore's, noted that drug education is integrated into the schools' curricula through religion and science classes, she said the D.A.R.E. program offers children a deeper understanding of the dangers of drugs.

"It has become an enrichment program," Sister Englert said. "It is more focused with a policeman there."

On May 22, the fifth- and sixth-grade students at St. Theodore's had their final class instruction with "Deputy Ed" in preparation for their graduation on May 29.

During the session, Ramsperger reviewed several of the themes that he had taught the students during the 17-week



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer
Monroe County Deputy Sheriff Edward Ramsperger (left) works with sixth-graders Matt Annis (center) and Joey Kwiatkowski during a recent Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) program at St. Theodore's in Gates.

program. One of the points he stressed was the importance of having a strong support system to live a drug-free lifestyle.

Some types of support systems that students suggested were family, friends, sports, music and pets. Ramsperger noted, for example, that a support system helps a person deal with a bad day in school or at the office.

A strong self-esteem is another important factor in avoiding drugs, according to Ramsperger. The sheriff's deputy said he tried to teach the students ways in which they can build themselves up. Several students said his techniques were successful.

"It helped me to be more assertive," said Lauren Turner, a fifth-grader at St. Theodore's.

Beth Schranz said she learned not to be so hard on herself when she made a mistake or failed at a task.

"It gave me a more positive attitude," Schranz said. "Now if I get bad marks I don't put myself down. I just know I can do a better job if I study."

Mike Zambuto said he learned that even

if he is under stress, drugs are not the answer. "In pressure times don't settle by taking drugs," the fifth-grader advised.

Ramsperger said another point that he tried to teach the youths is that "Just say no" is not just another slogan. Simply saying "no" to those who offer drugs really works, he said.

Although most people perceive cocaine and heroine as the greatest threat to today's young people, Ramsperger said cigarettes and alcohol are the two drugs most abused by youths. And even though many of St. Theodore's students said they had not yet been approached by someone selling drugs, fifth-grader Abe Lange said that he had already put into practice what he had learned during the D.A.R.E. program.

"I stay away from the kids who smoke

cigarettes on the road by my house," said Lange.

Most of the 60 D.A.R.E. students at St. Theodore's admitted that the most important lesson they learned during the four-month session was that choosing the right friends makes it easier to avoid drugs.

Nichole Marinaccio, a fifth-grader, said, "It gave me confidence to say 'no' if someone asked me, and I learned to hang around with people who you know don't do drugs."

Although the material that Ramsperger taught the youths involved serious subjects, the students agreed that the D.A.R.E. program was an enjoyable way to learn important lessons.

"It was a good way to learn because we had fun at the same time," sixth-grader Michael Celento said.

Corrections

Two feature articles in the May 23 *Catholic Courier* contained errors or incomplete information.

The youth story on page 18 incorrectly referred to a Communion service at Groveland Correctional Facility as a Mass.

In photos accompanying the *Insight* feature (pages 10-11), we inadvertently

failed to identify 16-month-old Grace Buckley as the little girl sitting on the "Welcome" mat in front of the Servas home.

Also, Maurand Seil, who was pictured with his daughter, Alice Servas, is a resident of St. Ann's Home in Rochester, not St. John's Home, as the caption indicated.

We regret the errors.

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