

## Officer Edmonds enjoying halls of Crete Public Schools

*COPS grant awarded for school resource officer to foster positive connection with law enforcement*

by **Jenn Lampila**

Managing Editor

Crete Police Officer Dawn Edmonds wants the days of parents jokingly telling young children the "police will come take them away if they're bad," to be over, because it can hinder her ability to do her job.

Simply: kids shouldn't be afraid of the police.

In her first few months as Crete Public Schools' School Resource Officer, she has noticed the largest turnaround in attitudes at the elementary level, where kids now smile, say "hi" and ask her for help if they need it.

CPS, the City of Crete and Crete Police Department cooperated on securing a COPS (Community Oriented Policing Services) grant for three years, with an option for a fourth, from the U.S. Department of Justice. Crete PD agreed to have an officer fill the position and devote 75 percent of her time to the school. Crete was one of four agencies in the state to be accepted for the grant.

Edmonds, a mother of eight who's oldest is 22, volunteered for the position.

Kids at Crete High School and Middle School were familiar with her due to visits to those buildings during regular duty, but she found some kids at the elementary school were terrified to see someone in uniform.

"We want to bridge the gap between law enforcement and the students," she said. "In an emergency, we want them to turn to us."

Each school building held an assembly to introduce Edmonds to the students when she started in January. She has a school email address for com-



Jenn Lampila/The Crete News

Crete Police Officer and School Resource Officer Dawn Edmonds helps a young student with the "Feed the Cop" game at Friday's Crete Elementary Carnival.

munication with teachers and even students, individually.

"Kids can contact me if they need to and they now come up and say 'hi,'" Edmonds said.

At Friday's Elementary Carnival, Edmonds worked a game booth and when she was leaving, two kids asked for her help in locating their brother. They weren't scared of her and sought out her help.

She met with administrators before the start of the program, to talk about goals, schedules, and what each wanted to gain from having an officer in the schools. Edmonds' schedule is varied because she does not want it known when she will or will not be in any particular building. She will also adjust her schedule to have a presence at after-school events.

"This is about being proactive and having some additional assistance on our school sites," Superintendent Kyle McGowan

said at a school board meeting in December. "An officer should become familiar with our school families, students, and staff, not to be a bouncer, or someone intimidating."

McGowan said Edmonds should be a resource for kids and staff.

Crete Police Chief Steve Hensel said the department has been familiar with the COPS hiring program for many years and the grant gave them the option to assist the school. He said a series of goals were outlined for the program in Crete, pertaining to the reduction of violence, gang activity and drug use as well as other areas. Measurable objectives will continue to be developed to show the program's progress.

"We want the public to see us as people rather than the uniform," Hensel said.

Hensel also noted the department polices a population,

not necessarily a geographic area and when a significant portion of the town's population is in several buildings for most of the day, the schools, it is reasonable to have a presence.

Edmonds has already had requests from teachers to talk about various issues with students in social studies and ELL classrooms. She plans to continue coordination with administrators on developing needs within each building, although it is a challenge spreading the resources to each building.

"I'm working with the staff and they feel comfortable calling, reaching out," she said.

Elementary principal Erin Gonzalez said Edmonds has already developed a rapport with students and can see where she can assist in a number of areas.

"I don't know what we have done without her," Gonzalez said.



# NEWS RELEASE

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THE AMERICAN LEGION, DEPARTMENT OF NEBRASKA  
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Contact: John Thompson @ 402-464-6338  
January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2017

## NEBRASKA AMERICAN LEGION HONORS LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER OF THE YEAR

The Nebraska American Legion honored Senior Officer Dawn M Jonas of the Crete Police Department, Crete, Nebraska as their “2016 Law Enforcement Officer of the Year” during the 85<sup>th</sup> Department Mid-Year Conference held on January 14<sup>th</sup> in Grand Island, Nebraska.

Officer Jonas has been with the Crete Police Department for the past 13 years and is currently the School Resource Officer. Additionally, she performs duties as the traffic enforcement coordinator, lead chemical instructor, field training officer, active threat instructor and is on the human trafficking task force. Officer Jonas heroism is without question as she placed herself between a teenager and a man holding a pistol, shielding the teenager from threat. In addition to her Police duties, Officer Jonas also works with the “Teammates” program, the Limited English Proficient program, and was named in a national publication as being an integral reason Crete was selected as a leader in inclusion/welcoming efforts. Demonstrations of her devotion to the community and children can be found in her efforts with “Stuff the Cruiser” and Advocacy with a Heart and has served as a Marine Air traffic controller.

Dawn lives in Wilber with her husband Matt.

Department Commander Beth Linn presented Officer Jonas with a certificate and plaque and thanked her for her dedication to duty. Following selection as Nebraska’s Law Enforcement Officer of the Year, Officer Jonas’ name has been submitted for consideration as the National Law Enforcement Officer of the Year.



TOP STORY

## **Crete police officer named Nebraska Law Enforcement Officer of the Year**

BAILEY SCHULZ  
**Lincoln Journal Star**  
**Mar 12, 2017**

A Crete Police Department officer has been named the 2016 American Legion Department of Nebraska Law Enforcement Officer of the Year.

Dawn Jonas, a senior patrol officer and school resource officer, found out she won the award in December. "I was actually pretty surprised," she said. "I figured there were probably a lot of people more deserving."

Jonas joined the Crete Police Department in 2003, following a stint in the Marines from 1988 to 1991.

Jonas' supervisor, Lt. Gary Young Jr., said the military background is part of what led Crete Police Chief Steve Hensel, a U.S. Army veteran, to nominate Jonas. "Our chief does not hand out awards lightly," he said. "We believe in hard work and earning what you get, and he felt in this case that this was a fairly easy decision to nominate Dawn."

A mother of eight, Jonas said her work with Crete Public Schools, St. James Catholic School and Doane University is similar to her role as a parent. "I'm just getting paid to do what I do at home; I just go to work and parent," she said. "It's actually pretty enjoyable."

Young said Jonas' commitment to her work has shined through the years, both at the school and elsewhere.

About five years ago, Young said there was an incident where there was a man armed with a weapon and a child was standing in the middle of the street nearby. "She exposed herself to the gun in the street to get the child to safety," he said.

Young said Jonas displays the same level of dedication to the job at Crete's schools. "She's done a phenomenal job," he said. "There's just an amazing set of accomplishments she's done."

Jonas' work at Crete Public Schools has been so well-received the school offered to keep paying for her services once the grant funding her position ran out.

Jonas accepted the award in January, and said receiving an award as a police officer from a veterans organization was an honor. "Those are two very important things in my life," she said. Jonas said she couldn't do the work she does without her husband or her co-workers. "I might have gotten the award, but it takes the work from my department for me to do the work that got me the award," she said. "It was a team effort ... Without my department and without (my husband), I wouldn't be able to accomplish the things that I do."

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