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Prevention Resource Officers honored for service to W.Va. students, schools

CHARLESTON, W.Va. – Sgt. Howard John Haglock III helped investigate a custodian, leading to his conviction for sexual abuse. The Ohio County deputy sheriff and his wife then took in three students, siblings, removed from their home and at risk of being uprooted to the other side of the state.

Sgt. Haglock might say it's all in a day's work for a Prevention Resource Officer. His peers are honoring him as West Virginia's PRO of the Year.

Haglock was among several PROs recognized for going above and beyond during the annual conference for the statewide program, held last week at The Highlands near Triadelphia. PROs are certified law enforcement officers who receive special training to serve in their local elementary, middle and high schools. They maintain an office at their schools and are on duty a minimum 35 to 40 hours each week, and also typically attend extra-curricular activities throughout the school year.

"The PRO Program allows officers to establish trust with the students and act as a liaison between the students and staff," said Justice Program Manager Tanisha Travis, the longtime PRO Program Coordinator. "PROs are not only trained to respond to dangerous school situations, but also provide mentoring services and talk to students about issues such as bullying, suicide prevention and drug abuse."

The Department of Military Affairs and Public Safety oversees the program, through what is now the Justice and Community Services section of its Division of Administrative Services. As the name suggests, the program focuses on prevention as well as mentoring and safety. The 2019 conference provided training and certification to 101 PROs to serve in 32 counties – the largest number of officers in the program’s history.

“Schools with PROs in the building are the lucky ones, and since the program started in 1997, requests for officers have dramatically increased while funding has decreased,” Travis said. “It’s safe to say that having an officer in the school is better than not having an officer there. It would be wonderful if we could have them in every school in West Virginia.”

The PRO at Madison Elementary School, Haglock assisted with the investigation that yielded the custodian’s guilty plea and a 10- to 20-year prison sentence. By caring for the three student siblings, who include twins, he and his wife have ensured they continue in their stable routine at the school. They had faced relocation to the Eastern Panhandle. Among other service, Haglock also: helps students with homework after school four days a week; buys clothing and meals for students in need; drives parents and grandparents of special needs students to and from their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings; and has partnered with BB&T Bank to distribute baskets with a weeks’ worth of food to school families ahead of Thanksgiving break.

Deputy David Drahos, also with the Ohio County Sheriff’s Office, was honored at the conference as Rookie of the Year. In his first year at Warwood Elementary, Drahos has become known for building bonds with staff and students, educating the children about substance abuse and bullying awareness, and supporting the school during weekend events.

Ravenswood Police **Cpl. Tom Speece** earned the PRO Legacy Award. Speece will soon start this 19th year as a PRO at Ravenwood High, his alma mater, having helped the PRO Program get its start. He’s formed friendships with students that endure into their adulthoods. He helps them get jobs, visits them in hospitals, comforts them at funerals, attends their weddings, and helps welcome their newborns.

Also honored at the conference:

Above & Beyond Awards, for going above and beyond what is required of a PRO

- Wheeling Police Sgt. Don Miller, Bridge Street Middle School
- Wetzel County Dep. Randy Adams, Hundred High School
- Dunbar Police Cpl. George Rader, Dunbar Middle School
- Grafton Police Ptlm. Paul Collins, Grafton High School

Community Service Awards, for enhancing the PRO Program in their community and representing PROs and their departments in a positive manner

- Charleston Police Cpl. Gary Daniels, George Washington High School
- Greenbrier County Cpl. Rick Honaker, Western Greenbrier Middle School
- Harrison County Dep. Coty Shingleton, Liberty High School
- Harrison County Dep. Justin Talkington, South Harrison High School
- Hancock County DFC. Brian Hissam, Oak Glen Middle School

Distinguished Service, for going above and beyond what is required of a PRO in a manner requiring the officer to act with bravery, disregarding personal safety or injury

- Charleston Police Cpl. Travis Hill, Capital High School
- Ohio County Dep. G.J. Costello, West Liberty/Bethlehem Elementary
- Ohio County Cpl. Chad Clatterbuck, Wheeling Park High School
- Logan County Sgt. Nick Booth, Logan High School
- South Charleston Police Sgt. Fred Bean, South Charleston Middle School

Ohio County **Sheriff Tom Howard** received a Special Recognition Award for his years of dedication and service to the PRO Program and for his role in helping to plan and host this year's PRO conference.

"Every year, the stories of heroics and compassion of the police officers working in our West Virginia schools is exceptional," said DMAPS Cabinet Secretary Jeff Sandy. "This year's award winners are heroes to the highest degree."

Sandy said school-based law enforcement programs began in the 1950s, and have grown in popularity in recent decades. He noted that more communities began assigning officers to schools in the 1990s, amid growing fears about juvenile crime and high-profile school shootings as well as the resulting increase in funding for school-based law enforcement programs,

"Today, over 40 percent of U.S. schools nationwide, primarily at the secondary school level have assigned police officers," Sandy said.

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