

LT. RONALD HEWETT IN ACTION

State's Top DARE Officer Has Knack Of Establishing Rapport With Kids

BY SUSAN USHER

Lt. Ronald Hewett knows what it's like not to "click"—to not do well in a particular endeavor, or not be accepted by a peer group. He's been there.

He also knows what effect such experiences can have on a young person's fragile self-image, if they let it.

Self-esteem is the focus of this day's lesson, his favorite session of the 17 he shares with approximately 800 fifth graders each year as Brunswick County's only Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) officer.

The lesson is a natural favorite because Hewett teaches kids that building one's own self-esteem and that of others is the key to resisting pressure when perhaps the only people who offer you acceptance are involved with drugs.

Now in his third year on the job, the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department officer was named North Carolina's DARE Officer of the Year by a state association of 350 peers last month in Raleigh. The award recognized his ability in the classroom, his success in involving the community in the program and the commendations of his fellow DARE officers.

Catch Hewett in action in a local classroom and it's easy to see why others are quick to praise both him and the DARE program. The 29-year-old law officer and father of two draws on his own experiences and those of his students to make each lesson come alive.

"Can I let you in on a person secret of mine?" he asks a large fifth grade class taught by team teachers Cheryl Evans and Gwen Causey at Shallotte Middle School.

"All of us have things we are good at and things are not good at. Find the things you are good at and excel."

Whatever the situation, he added, "Do your best and then you can look back and feel good about it."

Hewett was using a DARE balloon as a visual aid to illustrate the ups and downs during a day in the life of a boy named Bill. When Bill's self-esteem gets a boost, he puffs and the balloon swells; when his self-esteem takes a blow, he allows the balloon to shrink. "Who made the difference in Bill's self-esteem?" Hewett asks, and the class responds together. "Bill."

"We all have days that start like Bill's," Hewett tells them. "But who makes the difference in how you pull through them? You."

Each semester Hewett meets once a week with fifth-grade classes at three county middle or elementary schools, guiding students through a highly structured program that helps them develop the decision-making skills, judgment and self-image they need to avoid getting involved with drugs and drug users.

He also spends time with them during the school day, eating lunch with students in the cafeteria and visiting with students in lower grade classrooms.

He'd rather be here than on the streets catching drug purveyors and users and other criminals, his job as a narcotics investigator when school's out.

"I feel like I can do better helping you not get on drugs than by busting dealers," he tells students, and they know he means it.

Each class closes with a ritual, a chance to hold the DARE bear (it's Hewett's turn today because of his recent recognition) and the DARE box—a shoebox in which students submit questions, anonymously if they like, for Hewett to answer. They're eager to share, and just as eager to hear his answers.

In response to one question he tells the class DARE is aimed at fifth graders because they are old enough to know right from wrong and to understand subjects such as life and death, divorce and drugs. But, as a show of hands in the class indicates, young enough not to have been offered drugs.

What would he like to change about DARE?

"If I could change anything, I'd spend more time with you. Seventeen weeks, seventeen hours, is not enough."

Another question asks what he'd do if he couldn't be a law officer. "I'd want to be a teacher, I think," he tells them.

It's only 15 minutes until his next class, but the students are still clustered around Hewett, asking questions, sharing information about themselves.

It's a rapport that Hewett establishes from the first moment he and the students meet, says Causey, a veteran teacher whose first exposure to DARE came this semester.

"All the children love it," she said. "They are anxious to see him come. They enjoy him eating lunch with them. There is a lot of respect of the children for him."

That respect is built on part on his classroom management skills, but even more on his straightforwardness and his sincere interest in people.

"He's honest with them with every answer," said Causey. "They realize that."

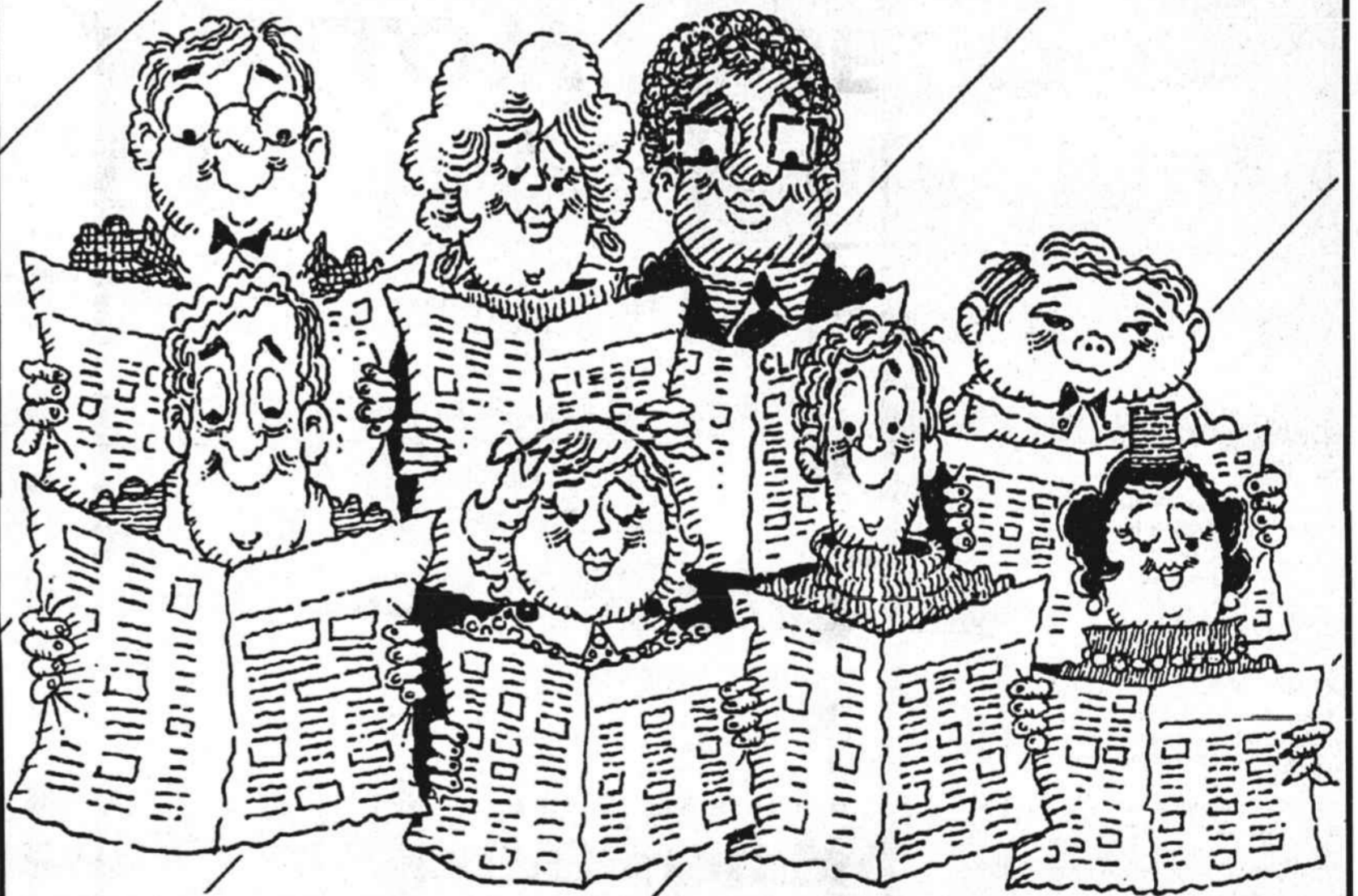
As one of the ice breakers during the first class session, he had students tell something about themselves. Hewett drew on his experiences as a Brunswick County native, West Brunswick High School graduate and veteran law officer.

"He knew something about every one of them. He knew their parents, or where they lived, something. He built that rapport with them from the beginning."



DARE OFFICER RONALD HEWETT responds to a question as students practice a skill that builds others' self esteem: giving a sincere compliment. Seated clockwise from left are Shallotte Middle School fifth graders Joshua Wilson, Leah Hewett, Lashaunda Stephens and Brandon Hewett. STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

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THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

'Sick' School Pilot Study To Begin At Lincoln Primary

BY SUSAN USHER

During a 60-day pilot project at Lincoln Primary School in Leland, a professor from N.C. A&T State University in Greensboro plans to bring in seven specialists to help pinpoint the source of air quality problems at the school.

The study, which could begin as early as next week, will be done at no expense to the county schools, Robert B. Pyle told Brunswick County Board of Education members at their regular meeting Monday night. Pyle has a research interest in "sick" buildings, particularly schools.

Along with heat and humidity, Pyle said he's certain that a "combination of things" including structural problems, pollutants, building design, heating and ventilation problems and a need for better preventive maintenance and cleaning are contributing to the problem at the school. As an example of one problem, he suggested that to thoroughly clean the narrow, long and angled ductwork, "what you need is a trained mouse."

Also, Pyle plans extensive air sampling as well as simply observing "what's happening" in the facility, in terms of movement patterns of people and air, keeping an eye open for other potential sources of contamination.

Since last fall students and staff have reported sickness and allergy-like symptoms, particularly in one classroom wing, that improve when away from the school.

Monday night two Lincoln Primary parents said their children are continuing to have recurring

health problems. Debbie Brown, whose son Gregory is in the second grade, said she believes poor cleaning is part of the problem. Tile installed in December to replace carpet in her son's classroom "hasn't been mopped since," she said. "I would like the board to look into it and clear this problem up."

Since problems were first called to its attention, the school system has called in state consultant William Service and completed nearly half the recommendations he made, at a cost to date of about \$35,000.

In a follow-up report mailed to Assistant Superintendent William Turner, Service said a recent survey showed a decline in symptoms.

"Although perception of air quality appears to have improved in some parts of the school, comparison of the complaint rates has limited meaning," he wrote, because more people responded to the second survey than his first last October.

However, he also said more work is needed in the second-grade classroom wing to counter higher carbon dioxide levels there. "Focusing on outdoor air ventilation and removing or cleaning any water damaging materials in the air handlers will have the greatest impact on indoor air quality," advised Service, a state industrial hygiene consultant. "Again, teachers should be encouraged to open windows and doors whenever possible."

Turner said the system has two new air handlers on order and plans to equip and train one employee to conduct air sampling tests in the schools.