

Officer Cathi Long, our School Resource Officer at Countryside High School, is hands down the Pinellas County Schools SRO of the Year. Her initiative, organizational skills, and commitment to student safety all work together to make her tremendously effective in getting results that make a difference at Countryside High School. She is always one of the first to step up to tackle projects and to share ideas that will benefit our school as a whole and, many times, goes above and beyond the duties of her job as a police officer, in order to do what is best for our students.

Some of the highlights of what she has done this year alone include coordinating our Operation: Graduate program along with St. Petersburg College, Clearwater Police Department, Pinellas County Schools, and the United Way. Every year, she identifies and works closely with twenty to thirty at-risk seniors in order to provide them with educational opportunities that focus on preparing them for post-secondary opportunities. On her own time, she also mentors multiple seniors who are not on-track to graduate in order to assist them in doing what they need to do in order to be able to walk across the stage at graduation in June. Along the same lines of mentoring, she also helps to coordinate the peer-to-peer mentor program where seniors who were formerly considered to be “at-risk” mentor current “at-risk” freshmen in order to help them transition from middle school to high school successfully.

Another duty she takes on is that of our SADD Club co-sponsor. This includes coordinating Battle of the Belts, Prom Promise, Red Ribbon Week, and the Christmas Toy Drive. Officer Long also has experience in the classroom in teaching certain units throughout the year in both Law Studies and Driver’s Education. During these classes that she teaches, she utilizes “fatal vision goggles” to show the effects of being over the legal limit of alcohol. She used grant funds to purchase a “DUI Tricycle” that is set up on the driving range and simulates operating a vehicle

while intoxicated. Officer Long is extremely involved with her students and is always thinking of new ways to mentor and educate them on the dangers of drinking and drug use in order to prevent future incidences from occurring.

One of the more recent and significant contributions Officer Long has made to Countryside High School has been starting our Teen Court (Restorative Justice) Program this year. Our Teen Court program focuses on Teen Truancy and Juvenile Arbitration. The Teen Court class (Voluntary Public Service) that we offer during the school day coaches those students in how to be an effective “jury of peers”. Court is held every Wednesday and Thursday and contains an individualized plan of consequences and education for students who commit non-violent misdemeanor crimes and/or who have chronic juvenile truancy. Our Teen Court program requires involvement from many stakeholders, including school administration, guidance counselors, law enforcement, the school social worker, the student, and their parents/guardians. In implementing our Teen Court system, we end up not having to refer students out to the judicial court system.

She has earned many accolades, including the Florida SRO Specialist designation, The Allen L. Moore Memorial Gold Badge Award from the Clearwater Bar Association for outstanding contributions to the legal system, the MADD Award for Outstanding Dedication to Underage Drinking prevention, and a Certificate of Appreciation from ‘R Club of Pinellas County for their Adopt-a-Family Christmas Cheer program. In our opinion, the honor of being named the 2015-2016 Pinellas County Schools School Resource Officer of the Year should be the next award that she earns. Whether she knows it or not, ever since Officer Long became a part of Countryside High School three years ago, she has changed Countryside High School for the better.