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Burleson Police Officer Randy Hicks was awarded the Texas DARE Officer of the Year award Aug. 11 at the Texas DARE conference in San Antonio.

The award is fitting, according to his chief.

"I believe that Officer Hicks has made and continues to make a difference in the lives of countless children in our community," Burleson Police Chief Tom Cowan said. "It's not unusual to meet the parents of DARE graduates who were themselves students of his. They frequently share their own stories of how Officer Hicks has influenced their lives. Randy truly loves the students and believes in what he is sharing with them."



Hicks has served as a DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) officer on elementary and middle school campuses for the Burleson Independent School District for 20 years. He has served as a DARE officer longer than any other DARE officer in Texas. Hicks currently serves as both a DARE officer and a school resource officer (SRO) on the Kerr Middle School campus.

"Randy Hicks is so successful with our kids because they don't just see him during DARE time," Kerr Principal Kimberley Cantu said. "He is in the hallways and cafeteria each day building relationships with our students."

Through a partnership between the City of Burleson and the Burleson Independent School District, a pilot program for DARE was started in August 1988 with sixth grade students at the elementary campuses. When sixth grade was moved to the middle school level, Hicks taught at Hughes Middle School. He has taught at Burleson Intermediate School (now Kerr Middle School) and Kerr Middle School. He has also worked at Burleson High School.

"Having served as an undercover narcotics officer and tactical officer for several years, as well as his experience as a patrol officer, Officer Randy Hicks has seen firsthand the horrific effects of drug and alcohol abuse," Burleson Police

Commander Cindy Aaron said. "The education he provides is the first step in tackling this epidemic. "His work goes far beyond teaching DARE. It is not unusual for a victim of a crime to request to speak to him, because they have had contact with him at the school, or have heard positive things from their children or another parent. The students and faculty have a great deal of trust in him. Since he initiated this program in our community, Officer Hicks has had the opportunity to mentor to other DARE officers. He represents a positive image of our department."

The DARE program focuses on the abuse of alcohol, the use of drugs, tobacco, and marijuana, and bullying. The curriculum is constantly updating to keep up with new trends that could endanger a student's life. This year's curriculum includes a new focus on educating parents.

"I think DARE has an important message to send to kids who will have to cross hurdles like this in the future," Hicks said of the issues covered in the curriculum. "DARE works if you have the triangle . . . the police department, school district, and parents . . . working hand in hand."

Jeanie Gilbert, director of resource development and emergency management for the BISD said "the students know he truly cares about their welfare. In addition to his duties with DARE, Officer Hicks has been working with students to teach them the harm and ramifications of bullying and bullying behavior."

This year, 2008, marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the DARE program, which started in Los Angeles, Calif. Hicks received his initial training in San Angelo, Texas, in 1988.

Hicks was hired by the Burleson Police Department in February 1986. In his tenure with the police department, Hicks has worked on patrol, was a member of the SWAT team and worked undercover narcotics. He also volunteers with the BISD's special education track meet and the Shattered Dreams driving while intoxicated education program as well as the Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics and the American Cancer Society Relay For Life of Burleson. Hicks is fondly known as Santa Claus to students and children in many schools and daycares as well as to the elderly in nursing homes.

The honoree and his wife Krystal have fostered more than 50 children over the past eight years.

The City and the BISD have an interlocal agreement which provides an employee, who is a certified police officer, for the DARE program in the BISD schools. The BISD pays half of the salary, benefits, and related costs for the DARE program each year.