



Reading Eagle: Susan L. Angstadt | Kids from the Reading Recreation Commission playground programs made cookies and cards this week for heroes - police, fire and troops. On Friday, about a dozen kids delivered them to city police. Aidan Torres, 6, reaches up to give a box of cookies to Sgt. Jacquelyn Flanagan.

After Dallas police killings, area cops express sadness and determination

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By: [Mike Urban](#)

Ten Reading children sat in the patrol room of the city's police department Friday, and for some it was the first time they'd ever met police officers.

The youngsters had just toured the building, and after hearing about all the things police do, one of the boys asked the officers a serious question.

"Do you ever get to go home?"

After being assured they do, chief training officer Kevin Ebersole gave him more detail. "We're just like you guys," he said. "We're mommies and daddies and sisters and brothers."

The day after five police officers were killed and seven others were injured in an ambush in Dallas - the deadliest single incident for U.S. law enforcement since September 11, 2001 - Ebersole's message was one that local officers were trying to get across. "The majority of police want to help people," he said. "And then we want to go home like everybody else."

Every police shift in Reading begins with roll call, and included in the instructions for officers each day is a reminder to be careful and to look out for fellow officers, Ebersole said.

Those directions were stressed even more Friday morning due to the Dallas tragedy, he said.

'I could be a target'

Police from a number of local departments said they were deeply saddened watching and reading news accounts of what happened to those Dallas officers, but said it wouldn't prevent them from doing their jobs in the coming days.

The fear and pain unleashed by those killings should not lead to hasty reactions that end up causing more trouble, Reading Police Chief Andres Dominguez Jr. said.

"What causes problems is people reacting quickly to something," Dominguez said. "They get emotional, and they react."

Dominguez, the first Latino chief in Reading's history, took office recently after his hiring was approved by city council in May.

When police are attacked, officers tend to get together and help each other out, Dominguez said. He

predicted the Dallas shootings would lead officers to come together to increase their

focus on safety, procedures and taking action to protect themselves when necessary.

Disturbing videos and initial descriptions of police killings of black men in Louisiana and Minnesota this week - the incidents that led to the Dallas protest where police were shot - will become part of longer investigations, according to Dominguez. In the short term, he said, continuing friction involving minority communities and law enforcement shows that it is never a bad idea for officers to attempt to expand their cultural awareness.

As an example, he said, some Americans are from cultures where it is acceptable for large families or groups to "hang out" in front of homes as they relax. Others who observe that behavior, he said, might see it as unusual and call police.

"It doesn't match with their experience," he said.



Reading Eagle: Harold Hoch | Andres Dominguez

On Friday afternoon, Pottstown Police Chief Richard Drumheller felt it was too early to assess the effects of the mass killing of Dallas police on his and other departments. "We haven't had a chance to talk too much about it yet," Drumheller said. The shootings, he said, were likely to draw police closer together. Asked whether there was additional emotion within the 46-officer department on Friday, Drumheller said there might be, but it was part of the job. "I understand when I put the badge on in the morning I could be a target," he said. "I understand that and my family understands that."

A timely visit

The Reading children who toured the department Friday came to deliver cookies, brownies, cupcakes and cards they'd made this week as part of the Reading Recreation Commission playground program they belong to.

The program was celebrating police, firefighters and military personnel during its Heroes Week, so the scheduling of their visit to the Reading Police Department was coincidental, but timely, said program supervisor Heather Boyer. "We're thanking them for what they do," she said.

Ebersole said it's good the children got to meet officers, and learn a little about their jobs.

School resource officer

Danielle Zacckey said that one



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Reading Eagle: Susan L. Angstadt | Kids from the Reading Recreation Commission playground programs made cookies and cards this week for heroes - police, fire and troops. On Friday, about a dozen kids delivered them to city police. From left, Kyleef Fleetwood, 8, walks down the steps with Field Training Officer Kevin Ebersole as the kids passed out cookies to the Reading Police Department.

of her favorite parts of her job is that she runs into a lot of people having bad days, and can hopefully make those days better. "We help those who can't help themselves," she told the children. Ebersole has been an officer for 11 years, the last five in Reading, and said most of the Reading residents he's dealt with have been respectful of officers.

But nationwide he sees a growing resentment towards officers that is troubling for all police, and should have them paying even more attention to their safety, he said. "On every call we need to be aware of our surroundings, and know what we're walking in on," he said.

Berks County Sheriff Eric Weaknecht said he gets frustrated when government leaders don't allow an investigation to play out before they make a determination on it, and referred to recent shootings by police. "If you look at the situation from one cellphone (video), it can make it look different than it was," he said. "Our leaders need to defend our process and our system. They need to let the investigation take place, go to grand jury and have a prosecutor. "If they (officers) did something wrong, they should be charged and held accountable like anyone else. But you can't be the judge, jury and executioner hours after it happened, you don't know all of what happened hours after it happened."



Reading Eagle: Susan L. Angstadt | Kids from the Reading Recreation Commission playground programs made cookies and cards this week for heroes - police, fire and troops. On Friday, about a dozen kids delivered them to city police. From left, Kyleef Fleetwood, 8, is given the option to do a radio check by Field Training Officer Kevin Ebersole in the department's roll call room.

Staff writer Stephanie Weaver contributed to this report. Contact Mike Urban: 610-371-5023 or murban@readingeagle.com.

