

# Rapport with kids key to success as police officer

By Sam Bari

Jamestown Police officer Jason A. Hopkins believes it is important for police officers to establish good relationships with children.

"It is so important to interact with kids," Hopkins said. "If police officers gain children's respect and confidence when they are young, they will not be afraid to go to the police when it could be necessary later in life."

His actions uphold his beliefs. Officer Hopkins has been an advocate for children most of his adult life, from coaching junior league hockey for 15 years to getting certified as a substitute teacher last year.

Hopkins was on duty as a police officer at a Lawn Avenue school dance where he enjoyed talking to the students. That started him thinking. He had a college degree, so he was eligible to take the substitute teacher's exam. If he were a substitute teacher, the children who knew him in the town where he worked would realize that he was more than just "Officer Hopkins." They would know him as a teacher, and friend, instead of just the authoritarian figure of a policeman.

He was right. After teaching a few classes, and seeing him in civilian clothes, he became known as Mr. Hopkins the teacher, as well as Officer Hopkins, the Jamestown policeman. "Getting to know me on another level made a difference," Hopkins said. "In their eyes, I was more approachable."

Nobody knows what children are taught at home, Hopkins said. If parents had a bad relationship with the police when they were young, they could easily teach their children to be afraid of police officers.

Children are very impressionable, and they remember what they are taught in those formative years, he said. He firmly believes that the precedent has to be set with school age children, so they feel comfortable about approaching an officer when they are older, when a situation could



Officer Jason Hopkins has been with the Jamestown force for over five years and is the only certified search and rescue diver with the Jamestown Police Department.

Photo by Sam Bari

be serious.

Public service has always been a major part of Hopkins' life. He was a volunteer firefighter for eight years, and he has been with the Jamestown police department for five years. He is the only officer on the force who is a certified

search and rescue diver.

This means he is certified by the state to search and retrieve discarded weapons, rescue people who are in danger in the water, and recover those who have lost their lives.

Hopkins was part of the team

that recovered the body of Derrick Cazard, who drowned at Fort Wetherill June 30.

"I've always wanted to be a police officer," Hopkins said. When he was in high school, Sgt. J. R. Carlow of the Burrillville police department became his mentor, and encouraged him to pursue his life-long dream.

After graduating from Bridgton Academy Prep School, Hopkins attended Johnson and Wales University where he earned a bachelor's degree in criminal justice. He worked his way through school drilling wells, and continued doing so until he had the opportunity to join the Jamestown Police Department.

"I answered an ad in the paper and got an interview with Chief Tighe and Lt. Donovan," Hopkins said. "They hired me on condition of graduating from the academy in Lincoln, which I did. I've been here ever since. I couldn't ask for a better department."

Hopkins said that the Jamestown police force is well trained, well managed, and is held together by a strong bond between the officers. "We work well together because we have confidence and respect for one another," Hopkins said.

He said that he looks forward to going to work every day, no matter which shift. Every day is different, he said. Something new always happens. "I can't think of anything that would surprise me," he added.

Hopkins, 29, is a native Rhode Islander. He was born and raised in Burrillville, where he lived until he married and moved to Exeter with his wife, Jessica, who is now a stay at home mom. They have a son, Jordan, who will be 2 years old this month.

When off duty, Hopkins enjoys spending time with his family, scuba diving, and playing golf. "We love to go to the beach in the summer," Hopkins said.

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