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News

Cops, kids bond

Dozens of children participate in Shop with a Cop program

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Christmas just got a little merrier for Grant and Emily Gerstorff.

The two were among nearly 43 area children who picked out toys and clothes Saturday with new-found friends – police officers – in the eighth annual Shop with a Cop program.

Emily, 11, couldn't stop smiling as she browsed Wal-Mart with Shannon Martz, reserve officer for the Grant County Sheriffs Department. When they met, Emily was quick to point out that Martz was the "only girl" officer at the event.



Grant Gerstorff tells Grant County Sheriffs Sgt. Jim Kinzie about the night goggles he is thinking about getting during the Shop with a Cop program. emoore@chronicle-tribune.com

"I feel sorry for those boy cops," Emily snickered with Martz, as they looked through clothes together and saw several male officers shopping among frilly Christmas dresses.

After finally finding school uniforms, Emily was excited to check out the toys and hoped to find some Polly Pockets and Bratz dolls.

Emily's brother, Grant, 13, shopped with Grant County Sheriffs Sgt. James Kinzie II. The pair and mom Renee Gerstorff filled a shopping cart with clothes and toys.

"I think it's kind of cool, that it's really giving back to the community," Grant said.

The pair laughed when Grant picked out a T-shirt that read, "It's all fun and games until the cops show up."

With a couple of dollars remaining in their budget, Grant and Kinzie headed to the Hot Wheels section.

"I'm a Hot Wheels fanatic," Grant said.

"Are you? I used to be," Kinzie told him.

Grant's favorite toy was a Nerf gun, and he said he will probably shoot foam darts at his sister and other family members.

Mother Renee Gerstorff said Grant and Emily looked forward to Shop with a Cop for days, and the two made thank you cards beforehand to give to the officers.

"I'm amazed," she said of the program. "I think it's wonderful for the kids to have one-on-one time, to see the cops from a different light."

Christmas for the family may have been bleak without the program, she said.

"It's absolutely wonderful the time they're taking on a Saturday morning to be here with these kids and families," she said.

Shop with a Cop in Grant County is organized by the Family Service Society and the Grant County Fraternal Order of Police. The program allows \$100 for each child to spend for Christmas, and dispatchers passed out goodie bags full of candy to the children.

Forty officers from every police agency in the county attended the event. Larry Shaw, FOP president, said often police have to interact with children in a negative setting.

"This gives us the opportunity so show them there's another side to us," Shaw said.

This was Martz' first time participating in the event, and she enjoyed her time with Emily.

"I hope I'll be more of a role model than somebody to be scared of," Martz said.

Kinzie said he hopes Grant takes away from the event the knowledge that he has a strong future, and that maybe some day he can give back to somebody else.

This was Kinzie's second time participating in the program.

"Just helping the kids, helping the families, helping the community - it's what we're supposed to be doing," he said.

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