



For more information about the Munster Police Department's Community Policing Unit, please contact Officer James Ghrist at 219-836-6639 or jghrist@munster.org.



Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) Program

The Munster Police Department's D.A.R.E. Program was implemented in 1988 and has now been presented to Munster students for over 30 years. Each year, approximately 1,700 Munster students receive safety visits and instruction from Munster Police officers in kindergarten (one class), first grade (4 classes), third grade (4 classes), fifth grade (10 visits), and eighth grade (10 visits). D.A.R.E. Officer James Ghrist teaches at Eads Elementary School, Elliott Elementary School, Frank Hammond Elementary School, St. Thomas More School, and St. Paul's Lutheran School. School Resource Officer Gabriel Isenblatter instructs the 8th graders at Wilbur Wright Middle School. D.A.R.E. Officer Ghrist was a member of the first D.A.R.E. class in Munster in 1988 and was named the D.A.R.E. Indiana Officer of the Year in 2015.



The program provides instruction on a variety of different topics such as stranger-danger, internet safety, following rules, respecting your parents and teachers, drug prevention, bullying prevention, being a good citizen, and more. The fifth grade students go through the main curriculum which concludes with a visit from selected D.A.R.E. Role Models from Munster High School who answer their questions about how to respond to peer pressure while also offering them advice for the future. A graduation ceremony, attended by parents, staff members, police officers, and school administrators is also held where the students receive D.A.R.E. t-shirts, certificates, and gift bags and a number of awards are presented to selected students.



In addition, Munster's students consistently participate in state-wide contests. During the past ten years, Munster students have won the D.A.R.E. Indiana Essay Contest three times, including during the past two years. Munster students have won the D.A.R.E. Indiana Poster Contest three times since 2005 and have also won the runner-up award during a number of those years as well.

The program is completely funded through donations from groups such as the Munster Lions Club, Munster Rotary Club, St. Thomas More Church, and the Parent-Teacher Organizations from each school. Area businesses also donate items that are provided during the graduation ceremonies (cakes, water, gift bag items, etc.). The program continues to receive a great amount of positive feedback from the schools and community each year.



Annual "Snowflurry" Event

In late February or early March each year, the Munster Police Department and Munster schools work together to organize the annual "Snowflurry" event, which is held as an extension of our D.A.R.E. Program and teaches children about treating others with respect, staying away from drugs, and making positive choices.



The event is attended by hundreds of Munster fifth grade students each year who are led in a variety of both fun and educational activities by Munster High School students who volunteer their time that day to mentor the children in a positive way. The event is also supervised by school resource officers, principals, and fifth grade teachers and is held at Wilbur Wright Middle School. It is funded by a registration fee.

Each of the students receives a commemorative t-shirt and is able to play games, watch a skit about respecting others, engage in small group mentoring activities, have snacks, and assist with a community service project supervised by the Munster Junior Woman's Club. The students are able to assist with decorating bags with positive messages which are used by the MJWC for Meals on Wheels deliveries, and over 1,000 bags are decorated each year by the participating students.

The event concludes with a closing ceremony which is attended by the parents where they can watch a photo slide show from the day, hear about highlights directly from the students, and recite a pledge with their children promising to always treat each other with respect. The event, which was originally started by teachers at Eads School, has been held for approximately 30 years in Munster and both the high school and elementary students look forward to participating every year.



School Resource Officers

The Munster Police Department has two school resource officers who provide D.A.R.E. instruction and security of school grounds while also providing advice to students, staff safety training, supervision of lockdown drills, and investigation of incidents that occur on school grounds. Both of our officers are certified Indiana School Safety Specialists and have also been certified through the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) through completion of their training. They also supervise security during events at the schools.

Officer James Ghrist handles issues at the five elementary schools (three public and two parochial schools) and Officer Gabriel Isenblatter handles issues at Wilbur Wright MS and Munster High School.



National Night Out Against Crime Celebration

The National Night Out Against Crime Event is held on the first Tuesday of each August, and is held to promote police and community partnerships through a variety of both fun and educational activities for all ages. The event has been organized by the Munster Police Department and Choice Community Council for the past 25 years in Munster.

Each year's event involves free swimming for Munster residents, door prizes, emergency vehicles, kids games, bounce houses, safety demonstrations, a helicopter landing, giveaways for participants, over 100 booth participants, food, music, Citizenship Awards, crime prevention information, and an awesome closing

fireworks display. In 2019, the event also added a Community Parade which leads participants to the event grounds.

The event continues to grow in booth participants, sponsors, school group participants, and attendees each year with an estimated 3,500 attending throughout the evening in 2019. In addition, the event has been nationally ranked by the National Association of Town Watch as one of the best National Night Out events in the country for the past five years, peaking at the 8th best event in 2019.

The event is planned and organized with the help of many residents each year and we are assisted by a number of volunteers on-site who help to run booths, sign-up residents for community policing programs, enter them to win door prizes, and supervise bounce houses for the safety of children.

We look forward to planning this event each year and look forward to seeing it grow even during the coming years. The event is always a very positive and memorable evening for our community.



Police & Fire Charity Softball Event

The Munster Police Department organizes an annual Charity Softball Event which has included police officers and firefighters from other agencies or school staff members. Each year's event plays for a specific

charity, such as the Cancer Resource Centre. The event, which also includes food, music, K-9 demonstrations, bounce houses for kids, has been held for seven years and has raised thousands of dollars for charity. We look forward to organizing this event for come with the help of other area public safety agencies and the schools.





Choice Community Council of Munster

The Choice Community Council was founded in 1994, and is an open forum for any Munster resident who would like to help plan, provide suggestions for, volunteer for programs aimed at drug, gang, crime, and violence prevention in Munster.

The group meets every three months at the Munster Town Hall to discuss plans for events such as the National Night Out Against Crime Celebration, the Police & Fire Charity Softball Event, special speakers (bullying, internet safety, drug addiction, etc.) for the public, and women's self-defense classes which are held at least twice a year.

Approximately 20 residents are involved with the Choice Community Council and regularly provide their suggestions to the Munster Police Department on community policing programs or suggestions for new town ordinances aimed at safety for residents. They also sell pepper spray canisters through the police department as a fundraiser to help purchase signs for the Neighborhood & Business Crime Watch Programs along with crime prevention brochures and other information that is distributed to residents during Crime Watch meetings. They also funded our McGruff the Crime Dog costume for use during community policing events.



Officer James Ghrist of the Munster Police Department currently supervises the Choice Community Council, which is a dedicated group of residents who care a lot about our town and about the safety of our residents. Their group has consistently been a tremendous support to our police department and community policing efforts throughout the year.



Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS) Program

Our Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS) Program was implemented in 2017 and is open to Munster residents over the age of 21 who would like to assist the police department with station duties, funeral escorts, traffic direction, vehicle tows, child fingerprinting, and general patrol of the business districts and neighborhoods as extra "eyes and ears" of our police department. VIPS are trained on how to report any suspicious activity to the police department and then are advised to withdraw from the situation right away.

VIPS have no police powers and do not carry weapons, but have become an extremely valuable asset to our police department by allowing regular patrol officers to focus more on their duties and preventing crime. VIPS are provided with uniforms by the police department along with necessary training and proper equipment to perform their duties.

The VIPS Program is currently consists of almost a dozen residents who regularly assist our department all throughout the year. VIPS have to complete a selection process which includes a background check and medical evaluation as well as a confidentiality agreement. We greatly appreciate their continued, dedicated service to Munster.





Munster Neighborhood Crime Watch Program

Munster's Neighborhood Crime Watch Program was re-organized and re-implemented in 2005, and started with one Neighborhood Crime Watch group consisting of 15 homes on Beacon Place. Fifteen years later, there are over 100 active Neighborhood Watch groups in Munster headed up by volunteer Block Captains and thousands of participating residents in the program.

That same year, our department began publication of the Munster Neighborhood Crime Watch Weekly Report, which contains announcements and news, police blotter items, crime prevention tips, and upcoming community events. The report is sent out both through local Crime Watch Captains to their groups and is also sent out to many residents directly who do not have active groups on their blocks. The purpose of the report is to keep residents informed about recent crime activity and prevention methods while also encouraging them to contact the police department when suspicious activity is observed.

In addition, the Munster Police Department also holds quarterly Munster Crime Watch meetings at the Munster Town Hall. The meetings always include crime statistics, a special speaker, news from the police department, and crime prevention tips. A gift card, sponsored by the Choice Community Council, is also awarded as a door prize. The meetings are always well-attended with an average of 50-85 residents at each meeting.



Munster Business Crime Watch Program

The Munster Business Crime Watch Program was implemented in 2007 following the great participation in the Neighborhood Watch Program. As of 2020, over 300 Munster businesses and faith-based organizations are current members of the program and receive the Munster Business Crime Watch Weekly Report each week by e-mail which contains slightly different news and police blotter items which are focused on the business districts and parks.

A representative from each member of the program are asked to either print and post the report for their employees or to forward it to them by e-mail in an effort to keep them informed about recent crime activity in the business districts while also encouraging them to take proper safety precautions and to call the police when suspicious activity is observed.

Members of the program are also encouraged to attend our quarterly Crime Watch Meetings at the Town Hall, and are also invited to participate in annual events such as the National Night Out Against Crime by setting up booths to interact with the public in a positive way. They are also invited to hold "Coffee with a Cop" events which will be explained further in this publication.

Members are provided with 5 X 5 window stickers to display at the entrance to their business.



“Cops & Kids” Holiday Shopping Program

In 2005, the Munster Police Department began to participate in the “Cops & Kids” holiday shopping program, which is was formerly known as “Shop with a Cop.” The program, held each December, allows officers to volunteer their time to take pre-selected children in need shopping for toys or clothing with funds that have been donated by local residents, businesses, and organizations. Children that are selected for the program must be nominated by sources such as the Salvation Army, school staff members, area churches, and fellow law enforcement officers who may have encountered the child while on a call for service.



The program has grown tremendously during the last 15 years, with one family participating in the first event and approximately 90 children participating in 2019. In addition, the Munster Fire Department, Munster Explorers, and Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS) members have also begun to assist with the program due to the large number of children involved each year. The event is held annually at Target in Munster, who provides snacks and knit hats to the children, and is always a fun and memorable event for everyone involved.

Dog Walker Watch Program



The Munster Police Department’s Dog Walker Watch Program was founded in 2019, and is sponsored by the Choice Community Council of Munster which purchases t-shirts for each of the participants. The program is held as an extension of the police department’s Neighborhood Crime Watch Program.

The members of the program are trained by the police department in reporting suspicious activity and potential safety issues while they are out walking their dogs around the neighborhoods. The program has been very popular with our residents and a number of them have been trained since the program’s implementation. We look forward to training more residents each year.





Citizens Police Academy

The Munster Police Department's Citizens Police Academy has been held for a number of years, and usually involves in between 12-15 Munster residents during each session. The classes are held for Munster residents who would like to learn more about the structure of our police department and the duties of our officers. Classes include topics such as criminal investigations, traffic stops, self-defense, basic first aid, crime scene investigations, arrest procedures, community policing, and a tour of the Lake County dispatch center. Each of the participants is invited to go on a ride along with an officer at the conclusion of the program and the participants are always recognized publicly at a quarterly Neighborhood Crime Watch Meeting.

The program has received positive feedback and has helped to get many Munster residents involved in other community policing programs such as Crime Watch and the Choice Community Council. The most recent class also provided a group donation towards several of the department's community programs.



Women's Self-Defense Classes

The Munster Police Department attempts to hold a Women's Self-Defense Class at least twice a year for our residents or for Munster-based groups such as the Munster Junior Woman's Club. The classes, which are instructed by Sergeant David Meyers, are always very popular with approximately thirty women participating.

Each of the participants are provided with a free canister of pepper spray at the end of the class, which are sponsored by the Choice Community Council of Munster.



Community Safety Presentations

The Munster Police Department regularly organizes safety presentations for residents and businesses on a variety of different subjects such as active shooters, drug addiction, and more. The meetings are always very well-attended and often involve other law enforcement agencies or community organizations.



Career & Job Fairs

The Munster Police Department often travels to career and job fairs at local colleges and universities such as Purdue Northwest, Purdue North Central, and Indiana University NW. Our officers provide information about the law enforcement field to young college students, pass out applications, and answer any questions they might have.

Our department also makes it a priority to encourage both female and minority applicants during these job fairs in an attempt to attract a diverse field of candidates for police positions.

In addition, our police officers often visit events such as Munster High School's annual Career Day to speak to high school students about a career in law enforcement.



Munster Police Explorers

The Munster Police Explorers Program was founded in 1994 and is run in cooperation with the Boy & Girl Scouts of America. The program allows young men and women from ages 14-21 to learn about a career in law enforcement while also providing community service to Munster. The program is supervised by Officer Gabriel Isenblatter.

Explorers attend meetings several times a month to learn about different aspects of a police officer's occupation and receive hands-on training in a variety of different topics. Explorers are also provided with uniforms and are allowed to go on ride alongs with our police officers to learn even more about their duties.

Explorers are also seen throughout the year at various community events where they provide traffic direction, child fingerprints, and other helpful duties. Every two years, the Explorers also go on a trip to the National Exploring Conference where they are able to learn from federal law enforcement agencies about different careers and can also compete against other Explorer Posts in subject areas such as crime scene investigations or traffic stops.

A large number of our former Explorers have gone on to careers in law enforcement with at least one of them serving in the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).



Community Readers Program

Each year, a number of our officers participate as Community Readers at several of the elementary schools, where the stories always end with a lesson for the students. The officers also participate in the annual Eads School Community Readers Celebration each May.



Safety Mascots

The Munster Police Department has three safety mascots who make regular appearances at various community events throughout the year.

Daren the Lion is the official mascot of the D.A.R.E. Program and is most often seen at D.A.R.E. events, graduations, the National Night Out Against Crime Celebration, and fun fairs. Daren is a symbol of drug prevention and making positive, healthy choices. The costume was sponsored by David & Paula Nellans in 2006.

Nat the Knight is the official mascot of the National Night Out Against Crime. Nat is a symbol of crime prevention as well as police and community partnerships. He will be often seen at the National Night Out Against Crime Celebration and other events aimed at community unity. The Nat the Knight costume was sponsored by the Munster Chamber of Commerce in 2020.

McGruff the Crime Dog is the official mascot of the National Crime Prevention Council. McGruff is a symbol of crime prevention and safety for kids, and is also associated with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. The McGruff costume was sponsored by the Choice Community Council in 2019.

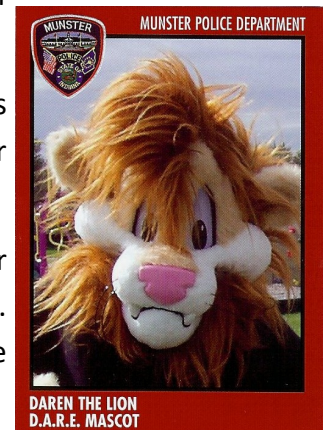


Police Trading Cards for Kids

In 2006, the Munster Police Department began to provide trading cards for children while out on patrol or at our community's schools. When the program first began, only a few officers had them and they were individually sponsored by local businesses. Approximately a year later, Miss Print in Munster contacted our police department and offered to sponsor trading cards for ALL of our police officers and safety mascots.

The trading cards have a photo of the officer, list his or her unit of service, and includes a biography of the officer on the back of the card along with a personal safety message for children.

Since the cards have been implemented, they have become very popular with children who often ask officers to autograph the cards for them. Our D.A.R.E. officer hands out over 2,000 cards in one school year alone. The program has made it possible for children to get to know many of our town's officers in a positive way.





"Coffee with a Cop" Events

Several times a year, the Munster Police Department holds "Coffee with a Cop" events at various locations around town. During these events, residents or representatives from local businesses can stop by to talk with police officers about various issues or just get to know them better. In addition, our department usually provides a free raffle basket for one of the participants to win (which is usually sponsored by the business hosting the event) and allows close-up looks at one of our patrol cars or our K-9 units.

Our Coffee with a Cop events are always very well-attended by the public and are always a great way for our police officers to get to know the members of our community in a positive way.



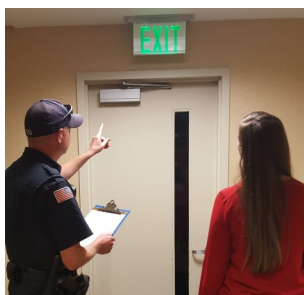
Additional Community Policing Programs



- Officer James Ghrist is a certified child safety seat technician and gets re-certified every two years. Parents are able to come to our department in order to have the installation of their child's safety seat checked for safety purposes, or for assistance with the installation itself. Officer Ghrist also provides safety talks for groups of parents and then proceeds to check their safety seats in the parking lot afterwards, and also is able to participate in child safety seat check events that are held in the area.



- Some of our officers participate in "National Donut Day" each year in cooperation with Dunkin' Donuts, where our officers stand on the roof of the business while others are able to collect donations for various police programs on the ground. The business then gives away free donuts to customers throughout the day. This event has become a great way for us to both partner with one of our area businesses while also raising money for some of our programs which rely heavily on donations.



- Officer James Ghrist is a certified crime prevention officer and is available to residents, businesses, schools, and faith-based groups to provide free security assessments of their buildings and properties. Building surveys include lighting, alarm systems, video surveillance, and other ways that members of the community can help to make their properties safer for their families and employees. Our police department also assists the schools with periodic assessments of their buildings.

**SOCIAL MEDIA
OUTLETS:**

