

# Crosses of concern: Local girl shows appreciation for first responders

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**EDWARDSVILLE** - In the wake of recent violence against police officers, one little girl is hoping to sow love.

**Arianna Nichols** has been making crosses out of beads for first responders across the country since September 2015. Her mother, **Laura Nichols**, who irons the beads after Arianna assembles them, said they have made more than 17,000 since starting. Many of those have been given to police officers, firefighters and paramedics. On Thursday

morning, she delivered more than 30 to the **Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Police Department** (SIUE P.D.). Arianna Nichols sent a letter to the department before visiting stating:

"Hello, my name is Arianna. I am 8 years old. I make crosses to spread God's word. God's word is peace, kindness, love, joy, patience, hope and faith. I am also Catholic and religious and loving and caring. I am a very happy girl. I hope my crosses inspire people to pray and love Jesus. I also hope my crosses protect you. Love, Arianna."

Laura Nichols said her daughter's mission is not politically motivated. She is not delivering crosses based on media coverage of tragedies in Dallas, Ballwin, Missouri, Baton Rouge and Kansas City. She is delivering them because she is genuinely concerned about the safety of first responders who perform dangerous jobs as part of their occupations.

"She loves all people, all races, all religions and all occupations," her mother said. "She is doing this for police officers and firefighters because she's concerned for their safety."

Arianna Nichols's mission began when she discovered one of her mom's friends had a husband who was a police officer.

"My mom's friend came over and said her husband was a police officer," she said. "So, I grabbed one for him and his wife, and they asked if I could make them for an entire group."

Her first group was the **Madison County Sheriff's Office**. Arianna Nichols delivered crosses to that department with her family. After those officers displayed their gifts on social media, other departments began asking Arianna Nichols if she could make them crosses as well. Laura Nichols said they have now delivered crosses in several places across the country. In fact, the family just returned from a Colorado vacation during which they delivered crosses to **Manitou Springs**.

"We have been showing support to departments," Laura Nichols said. "We've delivered them to the **Collinsville Police Department**, the **Collinsville Fire Department**, the **Des Moines Police Department**, the police department in **Savage, Minnesota**, the **New Baden Police Department**, the **Shiloh Police Department** and the **St. Louis Downtown Airport Fire Department**."

**SIUE Police Chief Kevin Schmoll** said the gesture from the young girl was awesome.

"I think it's awesome to show support for law enforcement," Schmoll said. "It's wonderful. It's something very special."

Schmoll said several people have sent well wishes to the department in person and via email since the terrible violence against police officers commenced in Dallas.



SIUE facilities management worker **Teresa Shipton** introduced the department to the Nichols family. Shipton's daughter was the volleyball coach for Arianna Nichols's older sister. When Shipton heard of Arianna Nichols's mission, she suggested coming to the SIUE P.D.

"When I saw what she was doing, I thought we had to get her out here," Shipton said.

The SIUE P.D. awarded Arianna Nichols a goodie bag full of gifts, including her first color-changing pen. They also allowed her to operate the air horn on one of their squad vehicles.

More information can be found on her Facebook page, **Arianna's Cross Mission**.

