

Local educator has raised nearly \$17,000 for Shop Wiith a Cop program

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - One educator in the **Alton School District** has raised nearly \$17,000 over the past six years for the **Shop With a Cop** program, which allows children in need to go Christmas shopping with an officer from the **Alton Police Department**.

Brian Zurek, a **sixth-grade math teacher**, said he befriended different resource officers in his schools during the 21 years he has taught in the district. They had helped him with projects he has done, so Zurek said he wanted to help them out as well. He started with only his sixth grade class donating money to wear hats or be in contests for the most mismatched clothing or dressing like a teacher. In that first year, Zurek raised as much as \$1,500. The year after that, Zurek began Jeans Week for the district, which raised \$5,000 - an amount Zurek has repeated for the last couple years. After six years, Zurek said he has raised around \$17,000.

"This is an amazing program," Zurek said in an email regarding Shop With a Cop. "It benefits the students that we teach. We have to remember that we teach in a high poverty district. Not all of our students are going to have the happiest of holidays. I just feel like I need to do something to help. I was lucky enough to be invited to shop with the students and I can honestly say it is one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. It helps you remember what the holidays should be about."

During his outing with Shop With a Cop, Zurek said the majority of children purchased something for their families while on their shopping trips.

"I really thought they would be spending everything on toys for themselves," he said. "This program is supposed to be for them. I was so impressed that they were thinking of their families too. This is what drives me to raise money for this program. It just makes you feel good knowing you are helping. Every year I want to raise a little more than the previous year."

Zurek said he was assisted with the program by a couple co-workers, including **social worker, Meghan Haycraft**, and sixth grade science teacher, **Melodee Hughes**.

"They are definitely my go-to people when I need help hashing out a plan," Zurek said. "**Kristie Baumgartner** was my go-to administrator for extending this idea throughout the district. She was incredibly supportive and handled all the communications to the different buildings in the district."