

Watchwords by Officer Tom Hanshaw
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A few weeks back, several community partners gathered to launch a new crime prevention effort called, "Be a Buddy, Not a Bully." Local leaders, including Mayor Kezer, School Superintendent Dr. Robinson, Fire Chief Brickett, Chamber Director Melissa LaChance, Representative Mike Costello and Police Chief Gagnon plus many others, visited each school, empowering the students to become community leaders. Thanks to the generosity of Mr. Brian Fecteau and Amesbury Chevrolet, each student was given a bright red wrist band to show their participation. The program was the idea of community leader, Rosemary Werner, and has been replicated in communities across the area.

One of the fastest growing opportunities for bullies has become the computer. As the use of social media resources grows, "cyberbullying" has become a serious problem; next week is National Cyber Safety Awareness Week, according to the National Crime Prevention Council. Although many of the actions of perpetrators are annoying and unkind, some can cross the line and become criminal. Only children under the age of 7 are considered to be not responsible for their actions, so children who use these sites and applications need to "think before they send." Essex County District Attorney Jonathan Blodgett has launched a new campaign to educate parents and kids about the importance of being responsible while using the computer. A poor decision by a young person can lead to serious consequences. In this era when children are more proficient in cyberspace than many adults, it's crucial they realize what they can and can't do online.

The Internet is a great tool, useful, entertaining, informational and powerful but by no means private. There's a common misconception that data sent or viewed disappears after it's been sent; that's very far from the truth. Everyone should ask if they want their message or image distributed to the public before hitting the send tab. Once it's been sent, you lose control over where it goes. "Cyberbullying" involves harassment, posting threats and the dissemination of certain images. Sending a threat, posting an inappropriate image and accessing someone else's account can cross the line and be considered criminal.

If convicted, the sender can be fined, required to register as a sex offender and even incarcerated. It's a serious issue, regardless of age. In Massachusetts, anyone who has attained the age of 17 is considered an adult in court. These crimes can be sent via text, social networking and e mail. Their actions can jeopardize a college application, job search, military service and many careers, where security clearances are necessary. Every parent should spend a few moments with their child to tell them, "think before you send!!" so their actions today don't jeopardize their future and tomorrow. Thanks to the District Attorney's Office for providing material for this week's column. For more information, visit the District Attorney's Office online at www.mass.gov.essexda today.

Forty-one vehicle owners will be receiving auto insurance discounts after taking part in the Auto Etch Program last Saturday, sponsored by the Governor's Auto Theft Strike Force and hosted by Amesbury Police. I'd like to extend a very special thank you to the following, who helped make this crime prevention effort possible; Lisa Little, Kyle Roy, David Olsen, Shawn

Roberts and Emily Clark. These hearty volunteers braved the first frost of the season to get the job done.