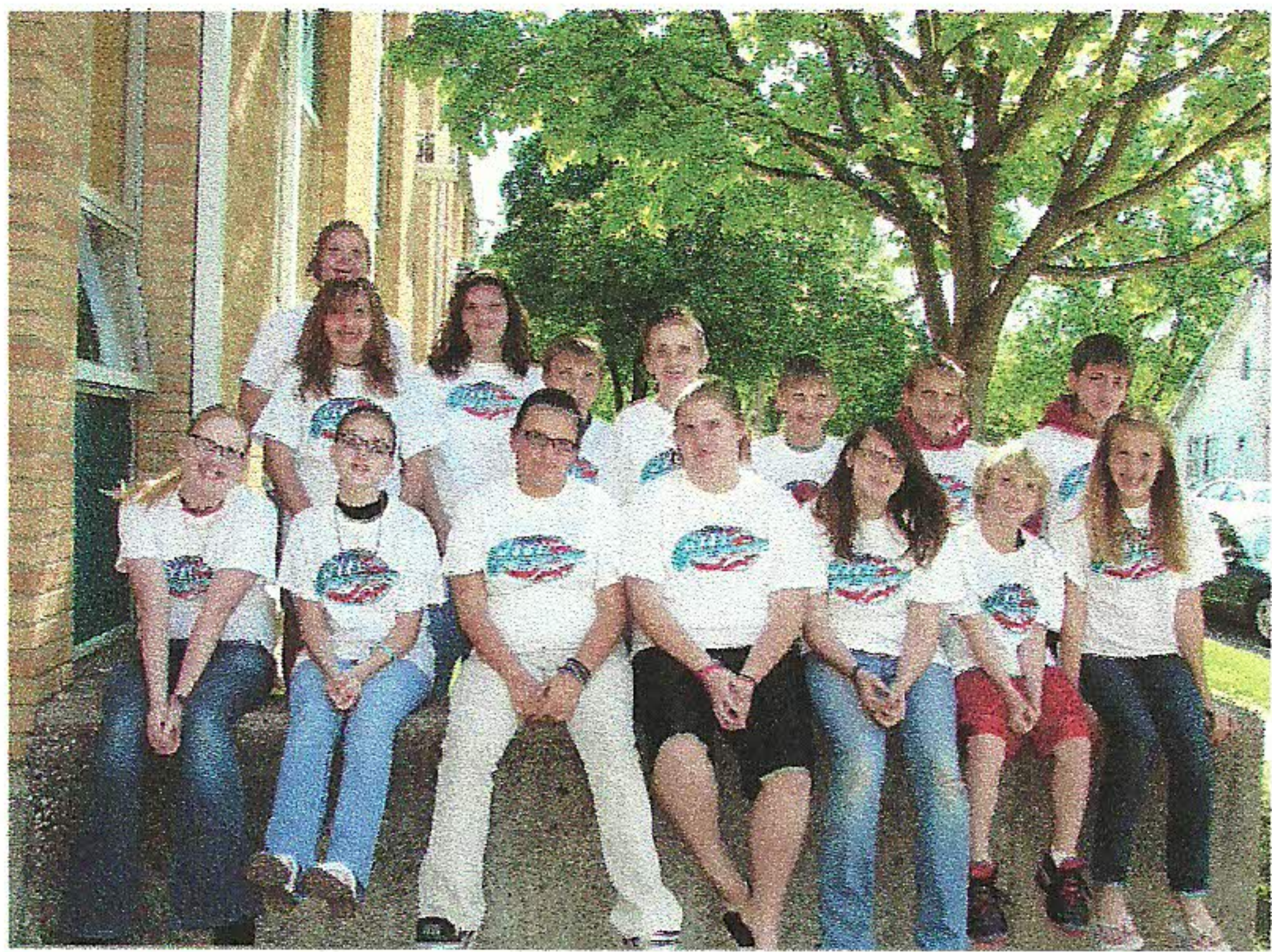


G.R.E.A.T. Gang Resistance Education and Training

by Sgt. Greg Evans

The question on people's minds when they see something about gangs is, "Does Lamar have a gang problem?" Right up front I will tell you, "no, Lamar does not have a gang problem."

But our kids don't always stay in Lamar. One student enrolled in G.R.E.A.T. told me a few years ago that she went to Oklahoma City to visit relatives. In the short time her family was there, they witnessed an act of gang instigated violence. She said that she recognized that they were gangs from some of the things she learned in G.R.E.A.T. class.



Granted, this is not a typical occurrence. I would like to think that lessons we teach kids in school, whether history, math, or G.R.E.A.T., last them a lifetime. The lessons students learn in G.R.E.A.T. teach them about themselves, their schools, and their community. It is a good follow up class for the 7th graders after they had D.A.R.E. in 5th grade. In G.R.E.A.T. we talk about drugs and violence much like we do in D.A.R.E. but we also go more in depth about community and how they fit into it. As any of us who have been around young people in that age range know, they look to see where they can fit in. Some choose sports. Some choose music. Some choose drugs or gangs. I like being there, telling them there are choices that they can make and it doesn't have to be the criminal lifestyle.

I have enjoyed a long career, with the majority of it dealing with these younger citizens. I enjoy talking with them and exchanging ideas about scenarios that we have in our workbook. Some of them come to see law enforcement in a whole new way and that police are not looking to get them in trouble all of the time. I try to impress on them that they can come to police for help with any problem. If I don't know the answer I can certainly make phone calls or point them in a direction to start. Some of the students are not familiar with what common resources are available in Lamar, such as the library or city hall.



Better information makes better citizens.

G.R.E.A.T. is a very important and effective program and I am making plans to start a new class in January. The books have arrived and preparations are underway for the class. I am ready for the challenges of a new class and of seeing young minds as they grasp the beginnings of a new concept.

