

ANDOVER TOWNSHIP LODGE #177

Big Wheel, cheek swabs & cops, oh my! Andover's 'Safety Town,' a hit with kids & cops

"Holy mackerel. Is this an exciting day or what?"

Jack, Arianne and Julia nod slightly, in possible concurrence. Madison twirls on the seat of her pants, day-dreaming about the perfect toddler afternoon. Jack and Joey gape into outer space.

Officer Rod takes a head count. Fourteen Safety Schoolers today, he announces. Light crowd. The others must be off to the beach, the pool or the lake.

"Who had pancakes for breakfast this morning?" he asks. Nobody answers except the kid who had Fruit Loops.

"Well, we're going to find out who had what," with a little swab test inside the cheek, says Officer Rod — a quick DNA identification program.

But Marley's having none of it. In fact, her face is collapsing and she's declaring her right to be different. "I don't want to do it," she says through gathering tears.

Her passion stirs a bandwagon of fearful agreement.

"Aww, cheek swabs are so cool!" says Officer Rod ... then he quickly changes the subject.

It's another day in Safety Town, Andover Township's two-week safety training program for four- and five-year-olds. The national program was adopted 18 years ago in Andover Township and local cops have been involved for eight years.

The two-week summer

training teaches kids about road safety, stranger danger, how to recognize poisons, what to do when approached by unknown animals, basic fire safety, computer safety and more.

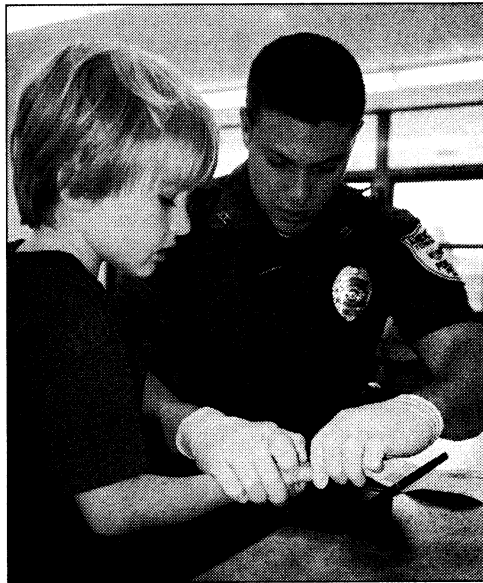
In the police-led portion of the program, officers take turns in the mock town set up in the local elementary school gym. Buildings and traffic signs are set up next to long stretches of rubber matting, laid out as roads. Kids ride Big Wheels, half of them purchased by the FOP, while officers man the floor, teaching hand signals, which side of the roadway to ride on, and what to do in a crosswalk. Kids also learn how to recognize stop signs and yield signs.

In addition to police training, there are safety related presentations by the fire department, EMTs, a local veterinarian, forest rangers and a computer technician.

Police Chief Phillip Coleman said the kids "get to meet my guys and find out that they're members of the community. We want our guys involved. It's a way to give back," he said.

"About half of us went through this school system," said lodge Vice President Rod Mosner, who heads the effort in behalf of the department. Thirty kids were involved this summer, although the program was offered to every child who entered the school system.

"We get to roll around on the floor and have fun with



Left: Brian Kern, lodge treasurer, fingerprints a Safety Town participant for an ID kit to be supplied to the boy's parents.



Below: "What do you do when you see this red sign?" Andover's Rod Mosner teaches rules of the road to Big Wheeling toddlers in the town's annual Safety Town training program.

the kids" for an hour a day, said Mosner.

Pre-schoolers say Big Wheeling is the best part of Safety Town, but the officers also teach stranger danger, why it's important to know your address and phone number, and when to dial 911. They also do fingerprinting and DNA swabs for an ID kit presented to the parents.

Police involvement in Safety Town is important, said a first grade teacher, because, "When kids see the officers, they're not fearful."

"It is also a great because the kids can get acquainted with the school before arriving in September," said Mosner, who also runs the local DARE program. ★