

Campus cop Pechatsko helps keep RCC safe

By Abrendal Smith
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How does a safety and security officer spend his days during Christmas break, when no one is on campus?

John Pechatsko, on first-shift duty at Riverside Community College's Norco Campus, said, "Well, just about nothing goes on, but the days are certainly not boring."

Because all offices and classrooms were closed during winter break, a typical stint for Pechatsko consisted of making sure all doors were locked. Beating the routine is all in the way you look at it, he explains.

"Sometimes I say to myself, 'I just checked this door an hour ago,' and sometimes I roll right along and check them all without a second thought. Even with classrooms empty, the RTA bus stops every hour on the hour as scheduled. Nobody gets on and nobody gets off. A few people on horseback wandered onto the campus from the riding trail on Third Street," he added.

Pechatsko says that his routine was broken one day by a large German shepherd that stopped, looked and growled at him when he tried to shoo him away. The sprinklers went on and off automatically, and there was no yard work except for the four men who came to clip some rosemary for their own use.

"A few kids on ATVs thought they were going to have a good time until they saw my vehicle. About 30 students came to pay for classes because they thought the campus was open. It's amazing how people see the parking lot absolutely empty, but they still get out of their cars and walk to the buildings and look through the windows," he said.

Pechatsko, a five-year safety officer, received his training in administration of justice at community college and is planning to advance his career in law enforcement by

becoming a U.S. marshal.

While anticipating his career move, he said, "About my present job, I'm happy as a lark. As long as I'm getting paid and have food and a house, it's not at all boring."

Pechatsko's work during school days includes such tasks as unlocking students' cars and jump-starting batteries. Regarding RCC parking stickers, he said, "If a person has a jeep or a convertible with no rear view mirror, we will cut down the sticker and laminate it to the windshield."

About getting locked out of cars, he said, "I see people all the time using the Automobile Club to get into their cars and jump-start their batteries. I just watch them and I tell them, 'You could have saved yourself some money, because campus security does that for you for free.'"

Pechatsko is actually a peace officer with police training in arrest procedure and firearms as opposed to a security guard, whose job is to just observe and report. If someone runs a stop sign or exceeds the speed limit, he interviews that person and gives him or her a warning. "We give no citations, but if they are repeat offenders, we stop them and escort them to the dean's office," he explained.

Pechatsko believes his days are made interesting by the numerous students he comes in contact with every day. There are about 20 he speaks to daily, but his most unusual friend is "a short guy with reddish hair who everybody knows as 'D.J.'. I see him moseying up the walkway and have to cringe because I know what's coming.

"He lets out this big greeting, 'Hey Dude!!!' Every single day. He's an all right guy, and I certainly would miss him if I didn't see him for a couple of days."

Pechatsko's work takes him to the Riverside Campus as well, and when he compares the two campus-

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es, he said, "In Riverside, there's always something to keep jumping you around, which makes the day go faster, but the best thing about Norco is the 360-degree country view from the Student Services Building. I see a lot of stray dogs, squirrels, rabbits, skunks — there's more wild life. It's a treat," he said.

Pechatsko has also seen a few longtailed scorpions. He said, "You don't have to be afraid of them. They won't chase you down but they can make you very sick."

Pechatsko says he will miss the friends he has made at Norco because he's going to do the rest of his 1,000 hours in his present job at Riverside. But if you see him and he doesn't recognize you, just say, "Hey Dude!!!!"