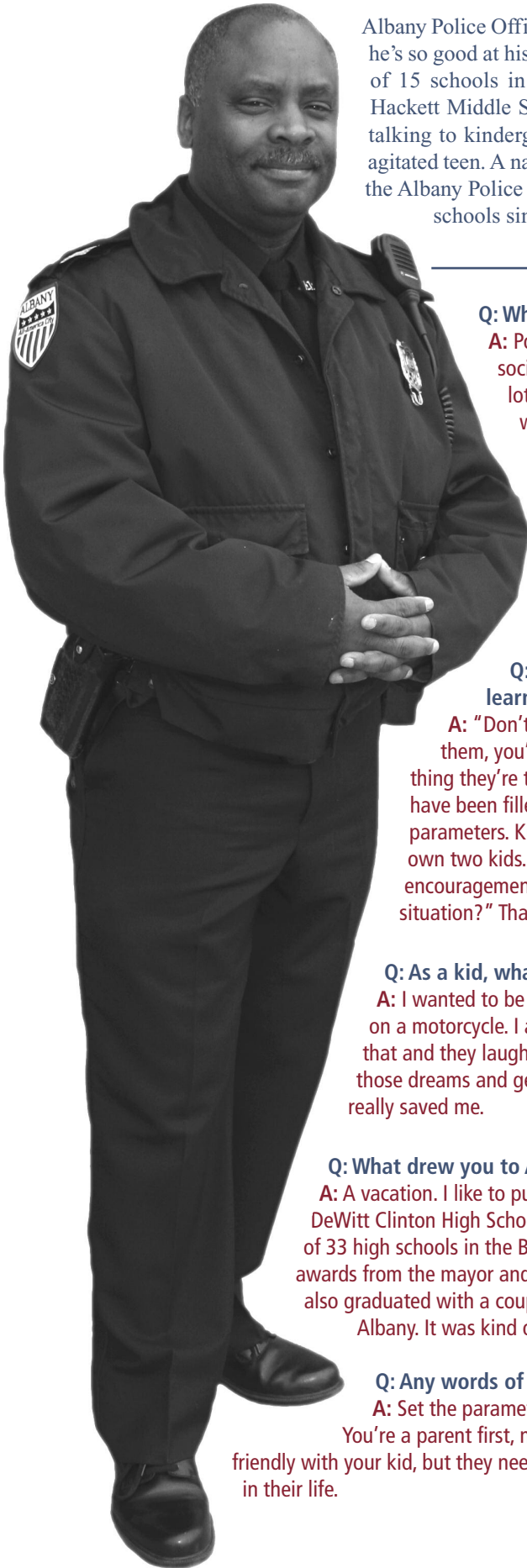


Leading the way

Meet Willie Hughes

School Resource Officer



Albany Police Officer Willie Hughes understands kids. That's why he's so good at his job as a school resource officer. Walk into one of 15 schools in the city on his beat – including William S. Hackett Middle School – and he might be doing anything from talking to kindergartners about crosswalk safety to calming an agitated teen. A native of the South Bronx, Officer Hughes joined the Albany Police Department in 1989 and has worked in Albany schools since 1993.

Q: What's a school resource officer?

A: Police officers in general wear a lot of hats – social worker, caregiver, defender and enforcer – a lot of different things. As a school resource officer, we're just more focused on a particular location: the schools. We're trained to go into classrooms or assemblies to discuss a number of different topics with children and adults. Occasionally they'll be hot topics, but usually we try to help bridge the gap between different segments, mediating as best as possible without having to enforce.

Q: What's the most important lesson you've learned from students?

A: "Don't give up on me." When you sit there and hear them, you're able to empathize. I know that empty, hollow thing they're trying to fill with something. This void should have been filled with nurturing and love and some parameters. Kids need that. When I see them, I have to see my own two kids. I'm a single dad, and I think, "What words of encouragement would I give them if they were in this situation?" That's what helps to motivate me.

Q: As a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?

A: I wanted to be a professional baseball player and drive around on a motorcycle. I also wanted a pet eagle. The kids ask me about that and they laugh when I tell them, but I had a dream. Having those dreams and getting involved with after-school stuff really, really saved me.

Q: What drew you to Albany?

A: A vacation. I like to put it that way. By the time I graduated from DeWitt Clinton High School I had a couple of scholarships. I was president of 33 high schools in the Bronx. I was captain of the fencing team. I had awards from the mayor and the governor and people on the City Council. I also graduated with a couple of ulcers. When I came here I went to SUNY Albany. It was kind of like a getaway for me.

Q: Any words of advice for parents?

A: Set the parameters to keep your kids safe. It's OK to say no. You're a parent first, not a friend. There's nothing wrong with being friendly with your kid, but they need to know you are the ultimate authority figure in their life.