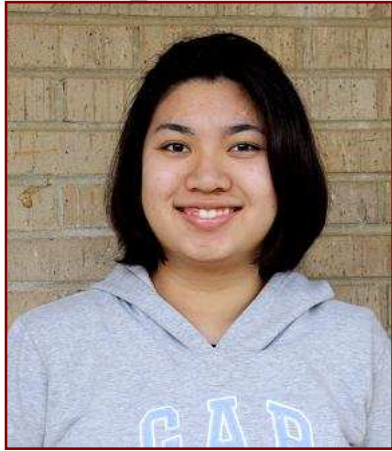


Smoke Signal Features



Thailand's Phithakwong is getting acclimated to life in Tennessee

by Jason Carrozza

Smoke Signal Feature Editor

"Everyone around here is very willing to help me, I love it," says junior Sirat Phithakwong, a foreign exchange student from Thailand. In her third visit to the United States she has broken only the surface of American values and culture, yet she already wants to begin a life here.

Sirat began her year at Riverdale High School like most first time students do. "I was very nervous and excited to go to school here; I haven't visited the country since I was very young."

In Thailand, the average school size is much smaller. So to Sirat, RHS is a "very, very big school" and she shyly admits to often getting lost without the assistance of senior Sarah Smith, her host sister.

Though she has enjoyed it thus far, Sirat says, "It's hard to make friends; it all moves very fast and most people here already have concrete friends."

Here in the United States, Sirat is experiencing entirely different concepts and situations (i.g. homecoming). But, she is excited about participating and says, "I'm looking forward to dressing really silly, but more than anything, I'm just hoping to have fun, and the same goes with everything I do here."

Sirat is not at all reluctant to try anything out of the ordinary; she is determined to "enjoy, adventure, and try new things" during her time here in the United States.

Officer Jones brings experience as SRO

by Kaylan Orphanos

Smoke Signal Staff Writer

Taking on his first year at Riverdale High School, School Resource Officer (SRO) Shawn Jones joins the "greatest student body and faculty in the state of Tennessee."

An SRO is a certified police officer assigned full-time to a public school. In order to do this, SRO's receive ongoing specialized training in order to be attentive to the area they serve and sensitive to the particular needs of students.



Jones' first stint as an SRO was at Blackman High School. He stayed at BHS for a year and a half before transferring to Oakland High School. After a year of service at OHS, Jones was given the option to stay at OHS or transfer to RHS. Jones said, "Although Riverdale was pretty much selected for me, I'm glad I chose to transfer."

"Before I decided to become a police officer, I trained K9 dogs. Honestly, that's one of the main reasons I chose to pursue a career in the police field; the dogs fascinated me with their capabilities," Jones said.

At the moment, Jones doesn't plan to make any immediate career changes in the police field. He said, "I'm happy with where I am at the moment, but sometime in the future, I may attend law school."

Jones is a graduate of Forrest High School in Chapel Hill, TN.

Policy on cell phone use in school won't change soon

by Natalie Musselman

Smoke Signal Staff Writer

The use of cell phones in public schools is often debated among students, teachers and administrators alike. Since cell phones are used for texting, Facebook, and countless other functions not directly tied to education, the school board created a policy to ban the use of electronic devices.

SRO, Officer Shawn Jones explains the ban of cell phones at schools is a county wide policy. Even the consequences are the same throughout the county. The first cell phone offense results in the confiscation and a five-day holding period of the cellular device.



After the second offense, it is held until the end of the school year. Although the school is not paying the cell phone bill, the owner has no right to collect the phone

after it is confiscated.

This long-term confiscation angers those who have experienced this policy firsthand; however, validation for this punishment exists. When a student brings the phone on campus, the administration of Riverdale High School is not, as it states in the agenda, responsible for any “lost, stolen, or confiscated items.” Therefore, it is the responsibility of the student to keep his or her cell phone safe.

However, is it right for a student's private property to be collected, and when is it justified to do so? “The phone should be taken up when it's a disruption to the class,” Jones says. Even if a student has just forgotten to silence their phone, the moment it makes a noise, the phone is subject to confiscation.

The agenda does, however, recognize the need for cell phone use, and therefore allows students to use phones after the final bell when leaving the building. For some students, this is enough, but for others, texts to friends cannot wait. In this case, a student takes a risk and should not be surprised if the phone is confiscated.

Tom Nolan, principal of RHS, says that cell phones are not likely to be allowed in schools any time soon. Too many problems arise from the presence of phones such as cheating and people sending messages that may disrupt the educational atmosphere.

“If used in the proper way,” Nolan says, “I could see a benefit.”

Until the day comes when students can handle the in-school use of phones, they are just one more thing for the administration to watch.

Students interested in community service have plethora of choices

by Kristen Lang

Smoke Signal Staff Writer

Students at Riverdale High School are constantly generating new ideas. Whether it's about an English paper or a new move on the soccer field and some students also brainstorm about how they can help their community and the people living in it.

Fortunately, RHS students can use that creative energy to involve themselves in school clubs that endorse community service. Senior Ashton Turney, president of Key Club, says they have quite a few upcoming events such as: Celebration of Cultures on October 1; trick or treating donations all throughout October; and the Atlas fundraiser. The Atlas fundraiser benefits students throughout Rutherford County who don't have enough school supplies. That fundraiser is accompanied by a competition between classes.

Mrs. Christie Crowell, Key Club sponsor and United States History teacher, says, “There are many ways that one can get involved with one's community--you just have to have a want or a need to be involved.”

Crowell also says students must look around for something that parallels personal strengths. She realizes that serving the community isn't for everyone. But Crowell says, once a student discovers something that interests him/her, they should narrow that focus. Being a member of a club in school is not required, just carry a focus and find people that have the same interest.

Sophomore Jenna Osborne says that she is taking part in a charity walk in October called “Amber's Walk.” This event raises money for children who wouldn't otherwise receive gifts on Christmas. “I do the walk every year with my aunt,” Osborne says, “About 300 other people walk [in all].”

Osborne's aunt says the walk is dedicated to Amber Jared who died in a car crash. Amber's mother created the walk for charity because Amber was her only daughter, and she wanted to do something for other children in her daughter's honor.

“I like doing community service and charity work because I like to feel I have done something for the people in my community. Also, I like to feel that if I ever needed them, they'd be there for me. If you can do something to help someone else, then you should definitely put your effort into it.”

Freshman Academy proving to raise test scores at RHS

by Jason Carrozza
Smoke Signal Feature Editor

The Riverdale Freshman Academy was first put into place in 2008 to aid incoming freshmen in the often rough transition from middle school to high school. A primary focus of the program was to isolate the majority of common freshman classes to

Class of 2015

the annex, in order to put all distractions aside. Freshman algebra teacher Ms. Miranda Nave said, “The original goal was to give all of the students similar teachers, to increase communication between the teachers, and eventually help the students through the process [of entering and being successful in high school].”

According to Nave, the program has evolved slightly and “somewhat deviated from its original path.” Its exact structure and goals are changing, but this doesn’t change the program’s success.

Before the program was created, the state percentage of freshman promotion for high school students was on a slight incline, increasing 3% from 2003-2004 totaling out at 64.3%. The freshman academy has proven its efficacy by raising RHS’s average freshman promotion rate nearly 30%. In fact, according to Nave, a “94% promotion rate” (promotion from the 9th grade, into the 10th) was recorded in 2010.

Spanish teacher Mr. Ryan Crigger has a majority of sophomores in his class. He said “Teaching sophomores, I can see a huge improvement in the over-all performance of my students.”

He even went as far to call them “angelic” in comparison to the students he had his first year of teaching in 2007 (the year prior to the formation of The Freshman Academy).

At any rate, statistics prove that the program aids the evolution and success of the Riverdale Freshman Academy.



by Kristen Lang
Smoke Signal Staff Writer

Every year, Riverdale High School sophomores find themselves sitting in driver’s education class trying to imagine the ground racing under them, the wind flowing through their hair, and the freedom of driving a car. These students are literally on the road to the freedom of a driver’s license.

The class does have one important requirement—being 15 years old before the driving portion begins. Students are not required to have their permit or driver’s license in driver’s ed, but they do earn a half of a credit toward graduation.

There are two parts to this semester class, beginning with the written portion lasting six weeks. Since driving is a new concept to most students, Coach Woodson, Breeden, or Aydelott show a variety of driving related videos. These videos contain information about driving itself, possible distractions during driving, and drivers involved in situations resulting in injury or death.

Sophomore Jessica Lowe says, “I think the videos are a huge wake-up call. They make you want to rethink everything you do when you drive. As heartbreaking as it seems, the people on those videos could be you, your friends, or your family in the blink of an eye.”

At the end of the six weeks, students take a 100-question test that counts as their midterm or final grade. Once the second part of the class begins, students get behind the wheel for the first time. A driver’s ed teacher rides in the passenger seat giving critiques and advice; two classmates ride in the back seat anxiously waiting for their turn to take the wheel.

“I remember when I was in driver’s ed a year ago,” says junior Natalie Musselman “One of the girls in my group had me so scared! She let off the brake at a stop sign when another car was coming from the other direction. Panicked, she slammed on the brakes, so

we're right in the middle of a lane! I thought we were going to get hit."

Junior Melinda Lewis says there are advantages for the female students, "It's a good thing if you have Coach Aydelott. He never makes the ladies pump gas!"

Driver's ed class not only helps students earn a high school diploma, but also gives students an opportunity to practice a new, essential skill.

Senior Bacardi Smith says, "When I was in driver's ed I had no experience in a car at all. I got really afraid to drive, but once I got the hang of it, I had a lot of fun."

Despite complaints, parking lots are closely monitored by SROs

by Natalie Musselman

Smoke Signal Staff Writer

Recently, students at Riverdale High School purchased their 2011-12 parking passes. To receive one, a student signs an agreement to follow the rules of the parking lot or face the consequences. Students have plenty of stories about breaking parking lot rules without a second thought, but there is purpose behind the rules.

SRO Officer James Coots says the rules have been in place for years. They were developed by a group of teachers, administrators, SROs, and the school board. "Everyone contributed," he says.

One of the rules prohibits loitering in the parking lot before and after school; it is viewed as a threat by school authorities. But, how is sitting in the car listening to the radio really a school safety hazard?

"I was in my car for about two seconds turning off my music and Officer Coots parks in front of me, sounds his alarm, stares me down and tells me to get out," says junior Michelle Quarto.

Coots says loitering gives time for problems to begin and can lead to disruptive behavior. The administration is not naive to activities such as: using drugs, drinking alcohol, and cigarette smoking that occur during those times when students congregate in their cars. The goal is to "stop problems before they start," according to the SRO.

For students who like to wait for traffic to clear out, school authorities suggest they wait inside

the school instead; if socializing before school is important to students, the administrators suggest meeting in a different parking lot.

When problems do occur, the signed parking agreements make the student's car subject to search by administration. If a car is being searched, the most important thing to know is the administration must have reasonable cause to conduct the search. Officer Coots says searches occur for many reasons, ranging from an informant's phone call, a student tip, or something he or other administrators observe. This is not a regular occurrence at RHS.

Another violation of parking rules made fairly often is caused by students forgetting something in their car or wishing to store something there for the day. Vehicles parked in the student areas are off limits during the school day. "I got in trouble because I was putting my backpack in my trunk. [According to the rules] I was trespassing," says junior Justin Garrison. The solution to that problem is to get permission from an administrator or SRO if a student needs to get something out of a car during the day.

The ultimate punishment for students who do not comply with the rules is the loss of campus driving privileges and/or towing of the vehicle at the student's expense. Check page 10 in the RHS agenda for the complete list of rules.

School counselors offer information for seniors

HOPE SCHOLARSHIP INFO—A representative from Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation (TSAC) will present information on the Hope Scholarship and FAFSA on November 10, 2011 at 5 p.m. at RHS.

ACT—The ACT will be given Dec. 10, 2011; registration must be completed by Nov. 4. Go to www.actstudent.org to register and for more information.

TRANSCRIPTS FOR COLLEGE

APPLICATIONS—To obtain an official transcript of your high school education, follow these steps: 1) Provide a business-size, stamped envelope addressed to the college; 2) Place \$2 inside each stamped and addressed envelope; 3) Print your first and last names on the inside of the envelope flap. Do not seal the envelope; 4) The transcript will be sent within two days if the procedures are followed. Note: The RHS counseling office does NOT fax transcripts.