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Local cops put themselves on the line for chocolate chip cookies

By Thomas Celona

It was a hard job, but someone had to do it.

Members of local law enforcement agencies stepped up to the task once again May 13, this time judging Health Advocate's second annual chocolate chip baking contest.

Representatives from Plymouth, Whitmarsh and Whitpain police departments and the Montgomery County Sheriff's Department were the celebrity judges for the competition held at Health Advocate's Plymouth Meeting location.

The company hosted the competition as a way to honor local law enforcement and to have some fun at the same time.

Health Advocate employees came up with the idea last year when they realized National Chocolate Chip Day falls during National Police Week, according to Jessica Parker-Smith, public and media relations director for Health Advocate.

This year, National Police Week ran May 9 to 15, while National Chocolate Chip Day was celebrated May 15.

"We thought it would be an interesting idea to merge the two," said Martin Rosen, executive vice president and co-founder of Health Advocate.

Company employees prepared baked goods with only one requirement: It had to contain chocolate chips. Twenty-seven employees prepared a plateful of desserts for this year's competition, with entries ranging from the traditional chocolate chip cookie to chocolate chip banana bread.

Patrolman Mike Caparella of Plymouth police, Montgomery County Deputy Sheriff Dave Cavaliere, Sgt. Cathy Penecale of Whitpain police and Sgt. Fran Wheatley of Whitmarsh police, along with two interns from the Whitmarsh Police Department, were the lucky judges of the competition. They sampled all 27 entries, giving each a score.

After lots of eating, the judges deemed chocolate baklava to be the winning desert.

Following the competition, Health Advocate presented a \$250 donation to each department.

"It was probably a nice retreat from the day-to-day issues the police have to deal with," Parker-Smith said. "Our motto is when the chips are down, they're always here for us. They're the first responders, so we wanted to give back in a little way. It's also nice to meet and greet so employees here put a face to the law enforcement."

“We recognize the role law enforcement plays in making the community safe,” Rosen said. “We just believe strongly they’re a part of our community and every community and we should do whatever we can to support them. The contribution is just a small thing we can do. For the community to be vibrant, it requires the interaction of the institutions, residents and businesses. Being a growing business in the community, we feel it’s our duty to be as supportive as we can.”

Health Advocate, based in Plymouth Meeting, is a national health care advocacy and assistance company that works with clients on clinical and insurance issues, according to its website.