

NESHAMINY

'He was here to save us'

The Herbert Hoover Elementary School community paid its respects to Officer Chris Jones.

By RACHEL CANELLI
STAFF WRITER

Besides the drone of a fire engine, and the whirring of a helicopter hovering above in the lucid azure sky, the only sounds that could be heard as Officer Chris Jones' horse-drawn hearse passed by Herbert Hoover Elementary School were a few soft sniffles in the chilly draft.

Bundled in hats, gloves and boots, more than 600 students and 100 staff members stood along the snow-lined sidewalk in front of the Middletown school on Trenton Road Wednesday afternoon, silently crying as Jones' procession made its way from James J. Dougherty Funeral Home to Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church off Bellevue Avenue in Penndel.

The kids, from first through fifth grade, waved flags and hand-held signs that read, "We'll miss you," and a larger blue and white banner that read, "We love you Officer Jones." Teachers also crafted a big blue bow to show support for police.

"He and his son were always the first ones I waved to every morning," said crossing guard Jill Lax. "It's heartbreaking now that I don't get to see him anymore."

As dozens of police cars drove beneath an enormous flag draped between an arch created by two fire truck ladders, the Jones family waved from their car to the children and school employees. Jones' son Brendan is a fifth-grader at Hoover.

"I think it's emotional for everybody," first-grade teacher Ann Molle said as tears filled her eyes. She taught Jones' now 12-year-old son, Brendan, and worked with Jones' wife, Suzanne, in the PTO.

"I feel for them. They're a wonderful family," Molle said. "You didn't have to know him. Just seeing his face makes you want to pay respect to his family and all servicemen."

Jones was killed last week, when on a routine traffic stop, he was pinned under his own police cruiser after it was hit another car.

"All three of his kids went through these walls," said Principal Karen Wychock. "He was a supporter of our community, so now we're pulling together for him and his family."

Jones' flag-covered coffin rode in an engraved clear hearse. Written on it was the message "A hero not forgotten."

Across the street from where the students stood, dozens more residents solemnly wiped their eyes as they waited to pay tribute to Jones, his family and fellow officers.

"Everybody should honor him because he was here to save us," fourth-grader Raechel King said as she quietly wept. "It's sad knowing that he won't be around."

Rachel Canelli can be reached at 215-949-4191 or .