





FORT PIERCE — The cookie caper in Fort Pierce proved not all crime scenes are violent spectacles of gore. Some can be a sweet mess.

A table in the back room of the Seminole Police Department, representing a home, was strewn with cookie crumbs, a juice box, straws and a large handprint in the middle of a white, powdery substance resembling sugar. Clues to the heinous crime were hidden in plain sight, waiting for the Police Explorers to reveal their secrets.

The cookie bandit had entered someone else's residence and consumed the tasty treats. The bandit left a mess, also known as evidence, for the young sleuths to find. Prompted by their fearless leader SPD Officer Tara Colleen Hardin, the explorers learned how to piece together the many pieces of the sweet puzzle.

"A crime scene can be anything, even someone taking food," Hardin said. "To the victim, this is the biggest thing that happened to him today, so we treat him with respect."

The young detectives examined everything on the table, jotted down notes like veteran cops, looked up, looked down and all around, searching for telltale signs to solve the case. The "victim," SPD Sgt. Joey Chapman, answered questions on the scene. The fledgling cops noted the date and time, asked Chapman if anyone else lived in the house and how long he was out.

Explorer Krysta Burton, 11, of Brighton, found an empty cookie box in the garbage; Jimmy Fanning, 7, of Fort Pierce, noticed extra straws on the table. They dusted for fingerprints and looked for footprints. Then Handsome Fanning, 9, of Fort Pierce, spotted a home security camera. After asking permission from the "victim" to view the footage, they watched the crime occur.

Once "suspect" Jaron Johns, 15, of Brighton, was brought into the police station, the detectives-in-training interrogated him at length. The crime was one of passion; the suspect smelled the cookies and wanted them. No one was home, the door was open, so he went in and ate the cookies.

"The crime was going into the house without permission," Hardin said. "He will be arrested and go to jail for it."

The Police Explorers learned to solve the crime by asking questions, taking notes and examining evidence. Hardin was impressed and praised the kids for their astute observation skills, finding the clues and solving the crime.

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