

Citizen Police Academies: Introducing Law Enforcement to the Community

Law enforcement agencies use a variety of methods to build relationships with the community. One popular program is the citizen police academy. It can be used to train volunteers, recruit volunteers, or simply introduce community members to functions and activities in a law enforcement agency. However the agency employs the citizen police academy, each of the agencies featured here recognizes its value to the agency and the community.

Palm Beach, Florida, Police Department

The town of Palm Beach occupies a 16-mile-long barrier island on the eastern coast of Florida between the Atlantic Ocean and the Intracoastal Waterway. The town is located 68 miles north of Miami, 42 miles north of Ft. Lauderdale, and 166 miles south of Orlando. Palm Beach is a seasonal town, with a permanent population of 10,500 that swells to 40,000 between November and April. The Palm Beach Police Department (PBPD) has 80 sworn officers and 58 civilian employees.

PBPD has 85 volunteers who contributed 4,636 hours in 2007. Completion of the citizen police academy is a pre-requisite for volunteering with the PBPD and about a third of all academy graduates volunteer for the department. The volunteer coordinator, after receiving an application and fingerprints, attempts to match the volunteer with a job that would be of interest to them. Volunteers work

in the records bureau, crime scene/evidence unit and the crime prevention unit as well as in the volunteer coordinator's office. Volunteers assist with code enforcement, agency accreditation, and special events. Marine unit volunteers ride along with the PBPD's Marine Patrol Unit. PBPD also has a volunteer emergency response team (ERT) with 46 volunteers, some of whom also volunteer in other areas within the department. In 2004 and 2005, Palm Beach was hit by multiple hurricanes, and the ERT supported first responders and manned the telephone lines. Many part-time residents, calling from outside the area, were concerned about their Palm Beach property, and ERT members shared damage assessments with them.

Citizen Police Academy

PBPD offers its citizen police academy twice a year. The spring and fall academies are scheduled to accommodate the fluctuating population. The academy is not heavily advertised, but its 25 spots fill quickly, and there are almost always a handful of people on a waitlist. The academy is funded by donations to the Palm Beach Crime Watch. Most people attend the academy to learn about police functions and the law and are attracted by the opportunity to be affiliated with a well-respected police department. Over the course of six weeks, attendees learn about the history of the agency, patrol functions, use of force, constitutional law, search and seizure, criminal investigations and more. A highlight of the program is a field trip to the Palm Beach

County Jail. Each participant also goes on a two-hour ride-along with a Palm Beach police officer. Optional training leads to cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) certification and attendees may also take a two-hour marine patrol ride-along and spend an hour in the communications unit.

Teen Academy

PBPD's teen academy was developed in response to community interest and has its roots in the citizen police academy. PBPD developed an agenda and a curriculum that kept teens constantly busy and relied on more hands-on activities than lectures to keep their interests. The teen academy lasts five consecutive days for seven hours each day to accommodate teens' summer schedules. The teen academy is open to residents who will turn 13 years of age by the start of the school year; the maximum age is 15. Most teen academy participants find out about the academy by word of mouth. PBPD also advertises the teen academy in the local paper in early spring. It limits the number of participants to 15.



An Active Schedule

After attending a briefing similar to PBPD's roll call at nine each morning, the 15 participants are divided into small groups that rotate through activities to ensure that everyone is involved.

The first day consists of a display of department vehicles and equipment, a visit with crime scene detectives and members of the special operations division, which comprises the SWAT team, the bomb squad, and the dive team, and a communications exercise that demonstrates how calls come into PBPD and are relayed to officers. On day two, the teens head to the Fraternal Order of Police lodge, where they engage in SWAT exercises using a Taser with blank cartridges on a Taser dummy, mounted bicycle training, radar and laser training, and felony traffic stop scenarios.

On day three, teens learn about drugs and gun safety and have an opportunity to take part in a firearms exercise. The teens also learning about interrogation, and each teen goes on a directed ride-along. On the fourth day, teens learn about driving and the dangers of driving under the influence. They visit a local swim club to learn about water rescue, and they visit the Palm Beach County Jail and speak with juvenile offenders housed there. On the last day, the teens spend time with an officer who talks about teen safety on social networking Web sites such as MySpace. They head to the town recreation center to learn defensive tactics and marine patrol. The day concludes with a graduation ceremony to which parents have been invited. Nearly 100 percent of parents participate.

Value Added

Without the citizen police academy, the Palm Beach Police Department would not have a volunteer program or a teen academy, which to date has graduated more than 200 students. The citizens of Palm Beach respect their police department, and the citizen and teen academies give them the opportunity to learn more about the officers and the agency, to feel like they are a part of the department, and to reaffirm their commitment to public safety in Palm Beach.

Sacramento, California, Police Department

Sacramento, known as the River City, is the capital of California and the seat of Sacramento County. Situated on the Sacramento River, the city is home to Sacramento State University. The Intel Corporation and the Hewlett-Packard Development Company are among the area's major employers. The Sacramento Police Department, made up of 804 sworn officers and 493 civilian employees, has jurisdiction over the 98 square miles of the city and its 450,000 residents. In 2002, *Time Magazine* and the Civil Rights Project of Harvard University identified Sacramento as the most racially and ethnically integrated major city in America. It is home to members of 48 different cultures, including Hmong, Vietnamese, Slavic, and Mien.

The Sacramento Police Department (SacPD) maintains a roster of 70 volunteers, who collectively contributed 1,800 hours in 2007. Volunteer activities include citizens on patrol, investigative assistance, technical assistance, office and clerical assistance, and other support services. Volunteers submit an application and fingerprints and undergo a department background check. The volunteer coordinator attempts to match volunteers to assignments based on their availability, skills, abilities, and interests. Once volunteers have been matched to an assignment, they are issued identification cards. Although it is available, volunteers are not required to complete the department's citizen police academy, as they attend a 40-hour training academy before beginning their assignment. The volunteer coordinator manages the volunteer records and the community service volunteers. Once a volunteer is given an assignment, he or she works under the supervision of the sergeant in charge of his or her unit.

Cultural Academy

The diversity of the city presented SacPD with the opportunity to transform its citizen police academy into an academy for different cultures. To date, SacPD, in coordination with the Sacramento County District Attorney's Office, has hosted cultural academies for the Mien, the Hmong, and the Slavic communities. The cultural academies are held once a week for three hours over the course of six weeks. The course also includes a field trip to the communications center and the training academy, which are located in separate buildings from SacPD headquarters. Adults of all ages participate; the youngest attendee was 18 years old.



The cultural academies cover many of the same topics covered in the citizen police academy but pay special attention to issues that are of concern to the evening's audience. Weekly topics include gangs, code enforcement, community standards, communications with law enforcement, neighborhood problems, and understanding what law enforcement say and do. One evening is spent in the Sacramento County Regional Citizen Corps Council's Neighborhood Emergency Training, which is an abbreviated single module of community emergency response training (CERT) for those not ready to commit to be a CERT volunteer. Presenters include the chief of police, as well as, his command staff, detectives, and officers from various divisions within the department

and the volunteer coordinator. Members of the district attorney's office and city code enforcement officers also participate in instruction.

The department uses community liaisons and faith-based leaders to reach out to individuals in their communities. The application process is simple for the cultural academies and does not include a background check. SacPD provides food at each academy session to build trust, break down communication barriers, and encourage attendees to arrive on time. SacPD opens the cultural academies up to 50 people per academy to reach a greater number of community members. The academy is held in a community room at police department headquarters that is fully equipped with audiovisual equipment. Each academy attendee is offered a headset on which to hear a simultaneous interpretation of the English-language presentations in the attendee's primary language.

Challenges

The obvious challenge for SacPD in creating and hosting academies is overcoming cultural and language barriers. SacPD first needed to understand how to approach each community and learn the best way to reach out to them. Through the assistance of the Sacramento office of the Regional Community Policing Institute-California, SacPD was able to obtain the tools and software to type in the native language of each culture. Interpreting is an arduous and tiring task, and SacPD needs multiple interpreters to get through the three-hour session.

Graduation to Volunteering

The volunteer coordinator makes a presentation to each academy. Volunteers are essential to the weekly operation of each academy and are visible in each session. Historically, there are many questions about opportunities within SacPD after the academy

graduation. Some people want to volunteer, others have suggested ideas to help further help the department and some have applied to be police officers. SacPD has had success in recruiting officers from the widely diverse community based partially on the trust built through the cultural academies. Volunteer recruitment has not been as successful due to factors including language barriers, further background investigation, and their willingness to be part of the law enforcement culture.

The Value of Cultural Academies

SacPD sees the importance of hosting each of the cultural academies. Members of immigrant cultures can sometimes misunderstand the role of U.S. law enforcement, and the academies help clarify police, responsibilities, practices, and procedures. The academies also help police win the trust of members of the various cultures represented in Sacramento; academy participants tell their friends and family members about their positive experience with the police. The academies also help officers and volunteers better understand members of other cultures.

Westerville, Ohio, Police Department

Best known for its boutique shopping and delectable restaurants, and located less than 10 miles from the state capital of Columbus, Westerville, Ohio, is primarily a middle-class town with an abundance of businesses. The police department's staff of 74 sworn officers and 34 civilians serves a population of 34,000. In this bustling and expanding town, police volunteers play a key role in promoting public safety, and the citizen police academy of Westerville reflects their importance.

Westerville Citizen Police Academy Alumni Association

The Westerville Police Department (WPD) has 79 active volunteers functioning under the

Westerville Citizen Police Academy Alumni Association in various capacities for the department. Upon graduating from the citizen police academy, individuals can join the alumni association to take assignments that free officers to conduct official police work. The volunteers enter data, staff events, and call on warrants. Volunteers work as child car seat technicians, enter police reports, assist with in-service training for officers and the Delaware Tactical Unit, staff the police resource library, support the department's Terrorism Awareness and Prevention program, help maintain the department's Web site among many other activities. One of the longest-running publications of the WPD, the Westerville Citizens Police Academy Alumni Association newsletter, is wholly designed and operated by a volunteer. As an added bonus, the alumni association allows the volunteers opportunities to network and keep up-to-date with local happenings. Further, the Central Ohio Cops and Kids Day, the largest event of its kind in the area, attracts a crowd of more than 5,000 citizens; it would not be possible without the assistance of volunteers.

Academy Operations

The citizen police academy (CPA) of Westerville was established in 1999 to develop a cadre of dedicated and willing volunteers whose efforts would give department employees more time to address critical issues. The academy is overseen by the WPD crime prevention officer and a civilian crime prevention specialist responsible for the volunteer program. Applications for the academy are continuously rolling in, at times resulting in a waiting list. The Westerville CPA uses local community events and word of mouth to recruit their applicants. They can expect an average of 25 applicants per class and has 262 graduates. Most CPA applicants are retirees who are interested in and familiar with law enforcement. For them, the CPA provides a way to use their skills while assisting their communities.

Course Procedures

The academy classes are organized entirely by volunteers, from registration to speaker introduction to participant management to the concluding dinner provided by the WPD. The crime prevention officer works the logistical side of the program while the CPA alumni assist with class preparations, setup, and facilitation of course topics. Each class is taught by a staff of highly knowledgeable professionals of the WPD. The Westerville CPA has now conducted 17 classes, with their 18th currently in progress. Each class consists of 20 students, aged 21 years and older. Curriculum topics include the history of policing, juvenile law, patrol procedures, forensic and crime scene investigations, and much more. The 13-week academy is offered twice a year. The length of the academy gives the participants ample time to learn the curriculum and interact with fellow students. A celebratory graduation ceremony takes place on the last day.



The Value of the Citizen Police Academy

The citizen police academy prepares volunteers to handle challenges that may arise as a law enforcement volunteer. Westerville is proud of the accomplishments of its volunteers and tries to never fail to acknowledge their contributions. In 2004, an alumnus of the Westerville CPA was recognized as the Ohio Citizen Corps Volunteer of the Year and had the opportunity to meet President Bush. Inspired by the growing interest among younger volunteers, the WPD

plans to launch a youth police academy this summer and a mentoring program for graduates of the academy.

For Additional Information

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VIPS Products and Resources

VIPS Program Directory

Law enforcement agencies can register their volunteer programs and search for others in the online program directory. Citizens can locate volunteer opportunities with law enforcement agencies in their communities. The directory allows users to search by zip code, state, keyword, and type of program.

VIPS Resource Library

Browse and download sample documents from law enforcement volunteer programs, such as citizen police academy brochures and descriptions.

Volunteering with Law Enforcement: A Citizen's Guide

This informational brochure is geared towards community members and provides basic information about the law enforcement volunteerism. Agencies can use this tool to recruit volunteers.

Educational Video Series: Introducing Law Enforcement Volunteerism to the Community describes the breadth and scope of volunteer efforts in law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve. It can be used as a recruitment video at Neighborhood Watch or community group meetings and events.

All resources and products can be found at www.policevolunteers.org.

The Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS) Program works to enhance the capacity of state and local law enforcement to utilize volunteers. VIPS serves as a gateway to resources and information for and about law enforcement volunteer programs. The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) manages the VIPS Program in partnership with and on behalf of the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.



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