

Behind the Badge: Citizens learn about daily life of officers

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We are in the process of hosting our Citizen's Police Academy. This program consists of an eight-week class that meets every Thursday night to discuss different aspects of police work.

I must tell you that I have had to eat my words about this academy, and hopefully, it shows my growth throughout my career.

The academy was first brought to the police department by Chief Mark Moline. I was a young supervisor at the time and thought the concept of teaching the public about police work was a waste of time and money and not very productive. I must admit that I was totally wrong, and this program is perhaps one of the best programs that the police department offers.

Officers who teach portions of this academy sign up time after time because it truly is a pleasure to interact with the community that wants to learn about the department. Officer Mark Alba does an excellent job in coordinating and holding this activity.

The program is designed to give the average citizen some general knowledge about the daily duties of a police officer. This department does so much more than respond to 9-1-1 calls.

Participants learn what takes place in our support divisions such as our Records Division. Each piece of information that is recorded needs to be filed and maintained. Last year, Records Division personnel processed 13,037 reports for the department. Many of these reports contained several supplemental reports as well as arrest information.

Each piece of property that is recovered needs to be secured and placed into our Property Section. Our Property Section personnel logged in 5,155 items in 2009. I can tell you we bring in more items than we release. Our property room facilities are overcrowded, and we are in need of more space (this is another article all by itself).

Participants learn what our Police Area Representative officers do and the numbers of complaints that they work. These officers are assigned to work and solve specific complaints. They will work with all the city's departments in an effort to discover solutions to the problems that they are assigned. This collaboration with all city services has proven to be essential in an effort to solve the problems in certain areas. A result of this program is that, at times, we actually solve and do eliminate the problems and do not have to respond to the area again. Thus, the quality of life is improved in the area, and we see a positive result from our actions.

We will also explain our Emergency Service Team, Training unit, K-9 unit, Special Operations section, School Resource program, Internal Investigations and Community Services programs, just to name a few.

Those who go through the academy will learn about the Criminal Investigation Division. This unit handles the majority of the follow-up investigation of past crimes committed. They range from homicides to thefts.

This unit is manned by one captain, two sergeants and 13 detectives. Our three civilian crime scene investigators are also assigned to this division. The division handles more than 2,400 cases in 2009, with a variety of results that ranged from arrest to the case being unfounded.

Last, but not least, is the Uniform Division. This division is home to the men and women in uniform who drive a cruiser as their office. This is the major division of our department that residents of this community see and have contact with. This is the largest of our divisions, and they handled more than 57,000 incidents last year. Participants get an idea of what it is like to be in a cruiser and respond to a variety of calls from a barking dog to a man with a gun call.

Perhaps the greatest benefits that comes from the Citizens Police Academy program is that participants gain knowledge of the quality of the employees on this department, and we remain connected to the community we serve.

Ralph O'Donnell is the chief of the Council Bluffs Police Department.