

Behind the Badge: Training facility truly an asset

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I was recently at the National Advocacy Center in Columbia, S.C., attending a training session on human trafficking. Participants, from local law enforcement agencies to assistant United States attorneys representing several states, were present at this training. The cases discussed were as diverse as the individuals attending the training, including a case from Los Angeles and a recent case in South Dakota. This brought home the fact that the criminal justice system is ever changing.

Thirty years ago as I began my career in law enforcement, I was not concerned with human trafficking cases in Council Bluffs; but today, our officers need to know the elements and what to look for in developing these cases. As society changes, crime changes, and new laws are introduced. We, as a department, must stay informed. Officers must be able to recognize and react properly to situations that might, on the surface, not be so cut and dried. It will be the street officer making the preliminary investigation into an incident who will determine if this incident needs future investigation.

This brings me to the point of this article – training. Our department is committed to training, and we have an excellent facility located south of town, which is constantly used. It consists of a 20-station indoor range and a 10-station outdoor range, along with a large classroom that can be divided into three separate classrooms, which are equipped with the latest and greatest that technology has to offer.

Last year, 27 different agencies – including local, state and federal law enforcement personnel – used this facility. We were fortunate to send 145 officers to 64 different outside seminars or training schools. This is over and above our in-service training for all officers, which occurs four times a year.

Our training facility also hosted six separate training opportunities including Taser certification. Yes, the officers must be hit with a Taser during this training – and most remember this quite vividly. A bicycle certification for patrol officers was hosted as well as U.S. Marshals tactical training, missing and abducted children training and a child sexual abuse seminar. We also hosted the department's rifle certification course for officers who wish to carry a rifle while on patrol.

Sergeant Charles Gorman is in charge of this facility, which is a shared facility with the Pottawattamie County Sheriff's Department. Gorman has a vision that includes making this facility first rate in the metro area by offering a variety of training opportunities.

We are in the process of updating the equipment that will be used in training our officers as we have received a federal grant that will assist us in the purchase of a "shoot-don't shoot" simulator.

This machine will generate different scenarios that officers may encounter while working. Officers will have to make a decision based on the information they have at the time, and the decision could involve the use of deadly force. We will be able to record the officer's reactions and their tactics in order to make them better equipped to do their jobs. Each scenario can have different outcomes depending on how the officer acts or reacts and should be an excellent addition to the training that is offered to our officers.

We will also purchase equipment for defensive tactics such as mats, red men suits and other items in an effort to keep the officers relatively safe while they learn.

The Southwest Iowa Law Enforcement Training facility is truly an asset for our department and the community.

– Ralph O'Donnell is the Council Bluffs Police Chief.