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Don't shoot ... without training

Lehigh Carbon Community College class teaches firearms safety.

By Genevieve Marshall

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A stranger in a leather jacket comes out of the woods and walks toward Wescosville resident Gerry Solt, who has just found a police officer slumped in his cruiser on the shoulder of a highway.

What does Gerry Solt do?

He tells the stranger to stop moving. The man doesn't listen and pulls a rifle from behind his back. Solt draws his own gun and commands the man to drop his weapon.

In the fraction of a second it takes for the other man to open fire, Solt plants a bullet between the man's eyes. The stranger drops to the ground, dead.

Solt, a 39-year-old security guard for an armored car service, has never shot a real person. He experienced this fictitious scenario through computer simulation in a new Lehigh Carbon Community College course called "Use of Force and Judgement Training."

The Glock in his hand was modified to use with a laser. The stranger's bullets were actually nylon balls shot from a cannon at the foot of the 12-by-12 screen.

Likewise, if an armed intruder enters Bill Jackson's Berks County home and tries to go after his wife or children, he has a plan: He would use his gun.

Like Solt, Jackson, 46, plotted it out in the noncredit course, which provides access to a simulator that is used to train the Pennsylvania State Police. The course emphasizes the importance of using deadly force only when lives are in danger.

The simulator, called PRISim, can play out hundreds of situations that are taped using actors. Students can act them out using a flashlight, pepper spray and an AR-15 rifle, as well as the handgun. All of the weapons and the flashlight are modified to use with a laser.

Although nowhere near as stressful as real danger would be, the simulator puts all of the senses on notice.



Anthanasios Milios, a former Allentown police officer, limits his students to 20 minutes of training at a time, so their brains don't get lulled.

"You don't want to start thinking it's a video game," said Milios, who retired from the force in November 2007 and is now a public safety and transportation training specialist at the community college.

Firing a gun at another human being is something Jackson said he hopes he never has to do, but he wants to test himself before it becomes necessary.

"I carry a firearm for personal protection and pray that I don't need it, said Jackson, who has a permit to carry a concealed weapon.

Jackson, a network support analyst for the college, was one of three students enrolled in the course, which ran for eight hours over two nights last week. The next class is March 30-31.

The \$100 course fee was a bargain compared to target practice, said Jackson, who felt he was doing a lot more than improving his aim. He was fine-tuning his judgment, he said.

Milios believes that anyone -- even people who never want to shoot a gun -- can benefit from playing out some of the hundreds of scenarios in the system's repertoire.

"You don't want the first time you encounter that level of stress, and that adrenaline rush, to be when someone has a loaded gun pointed at your head," Milios said. "It's a huge advantage if you can practice assessing a situation under stress."

On his laptop computer, Milios pulled up another scenario for Jackson that had him drinking a beer in a bar. "I hope they serve microbrew," Jackson joked.

As the scenario began on the screen about 15 feet away, Jackson stood between upended folding tables. He would use those for cover if needed.

Jackson noticed that a man and a woman seated at the bar panicked when an officer entered the room. In a matter of seconds, the woman removed a handgun from her knee-high boot, fired at the officer and ran out with the man.

Although his hand stays on his holster, Jackson never draws the gun.

"That's great," Milios said. "You reacted well. You decided to be a good witness and let the police do their job."

genevieve.marshall@mcall.com

610-820-6585

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