



Citizens academy takes aim at crime

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GODFREY — Alton police showed how they train and keep their response skills sharp Monday night, including using a computerized video scenario with armed suspects who "fire" back.

"You have to be in charge," instructed Pfc. Dave Penney of the Alton Police Department, after Bunker Hill resident Bob Brenner, 54, volunteered to "play" policeman, encountering a group of armed teenaged robbers on a wall-size screen.

Brenner used the altered Glock handgun — gutted and fitted with a laser — to take down a girl who aimed a pistol at him, scoring high marks for his accuracy.

Afterward, Brenner said he enjoyed seeing what a police officer might experience.

"One of my hands is shaking," he admitted, not expecting to have to "shoot" a teenage girl in the interactive video.

Brenner was one of about 100 people who didn't let the impending snowstorm deter them from attending the second session of the 2010 Citizens Police Academy at the Commons at Lewis and Clark Community College, 5800 Godfrey Road in Godfrey.

The drill, using the Professional Range Instruction Simulator (PRISIM), began with police Sgt. Rory Rathgeb explaining defensive practices and firing the laser-Glock at armed suspects.

"It's acting versus reacting," Rathgeb explained. "We shoot to stop them, then we shoot until the threat is stopped."

Once each scenario ends in a dark room, the system reveals the location of each laser shot that hits a suspect, if the "officer" reacted properly or fired too early or too late.

Penney is the department's only certified PRISIM instructor. All APD officers are training this week on the system, owned by Southwestern Illinois Law Enforcement Commission.

"It's the most real-life training system there is," Alton Police Chief David Hayes said.

Also real-life was a Taser jolt to volunteer Sgt. Shane Gibbs.

The program was a "show and tell" of police officers, a jailer, director of LCCC's criminal justice program, Drug Free Alton and Madison County 911 — all demonstrating tools and equipment or offering informative materials. At the community services table, Sgt. David Goins had a plethora of brochures aimed at helping people avoid being victims of crimes, along with free gun locks.

The narcotics table attracted attention, with its photographs of crack cocaine, a marijuana leaf, two tall glass hookah pipes and DVDs of drug deals.

"It used to be pagers, now it's all cell phones," drug detective Seth Stinnett said of dealers setting up their

transactions.

An older man asked Stinnett if methamphetamine is a problem in Alton.

Stinnett confirmed it is, and said the majority of the drug comes from "super labs in Mexico," just over the border. At the next table, traffic division officers — familiar faces to many motorists — had photos and crash study equipment on display, including a most unusual crash, that of a small plane along Broadway in 1994. The pilot survived.

Pfc. Mike Bazzell, the department's information technology officer, demonstrated how a "write blocker" works. It's a small metal box he plugs into a seized computer that allows him to view live data inside without altering their contents.

Two students in the LCCC criminal justice program said seeing the officers and their equipment was fascinating.

"It makes me want to do this; it makes me more interested," said Sydnie Williams, 19, of Piasa. She said she wants to become a special victims detective, and eventually work for the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Adam Walkington, 20, of Jerseyville, agreed that it reinforced his career choice.

"I want to start out as a regular police officer, then I hope to get into investigations," Walkington said.

Sgt. Mike Gordon, commander of the department's special Tactical Response Team, brought the heavy-duty equipment used in executing search warrants or hostage situations, including a battering ram, a "robot" with camera and remote screen, air tanks and body armor.

APD's big black Ballistic Engineered Armored Response (BEAR) waited outside.

There also was a restraint chair from Alton City Jail, hand and leg cuffs, protective masks, a handheld metal detector and photos related to the only escape from the jail, by Quantay Adams.

The Alton Police Department, LCCC and the Weed and Seed neighborhood revitalization strategy are sponsors of the academy. The next session will be crime scene investigation night, with police showing how to process latent fingerprints, make casts and impressions and compare evidence under a microscope, among others. For more information, call (618) 463-3500 ext. 3.

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