

News

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Citizens' Academy a labor of love

It's no great mystery why the Citizens' Law Enforcement Academy is so popular. Just ask sheriff's Det. Jeff Leikauf.

"It gives the public an inside look at the inner workings of the department," he said. "I've never had a single person come to this academy and tell me it was a waste of time."

The academy, founded by retired Lt. Kevin House more than a decade ago, continues to thrive despite El Dorado County's economic woes.

The current academy, which began Feb. 1, recently concluded its third week.

Participants in the weekly classes have reviewed the strenuous journey men and women undertake to become peace officers, toured the Placerville jail, gotten a sneak peek at the life of a dispatcher and learned the hows and whys of traffic stops.

In the coming weeks, classes will cover topics such as cold case homicides, crime scene analysis and gangs.

"I love hearing the comment, 'I had no idea' from people," said Leikauf.

Although each session of the academy costs between \$4,000 and \$5,000, department officials don't see the program going anywhere.

"I've met with both the sheriff and undersheriff," said Leikauf. "They have pledged their total support. They see the value in it. What every sheriff has realized is it's cost-effective."

Leikauf, who became the academy's lead instructor three years ago, first got involved by teaching several of the classes 14 years ago at the behest of House.

"I just stayed involved," he said. "I loved teaching those classes."

When the opportunity to lead the academy arose, Leikauf stepped right in.

"It wasn't even a question after that," he said.

Leikauf is quick to deflect praise for his coordinating efforts, saying the academy practically runs itself.

"I don't want to take credit for doing any of this," he said. "What makes this class work is the citizens and the people who teach the classes."

But his passion for community outreach is evident to anyone he meets.

“I just enjoy talking to people,” he said. “I enjoy being involved. I couldn’t imagine not doing it.”

The detective isn’t kidding. Not only does he head the Citizens Academy, but he also runs the Law Enforcement Explorer Post and trains Sheriff’s Team of Active Retirees (STAR) volunteers.

In Leikauf’s eyes, the academy offers several highlights for students. The ride-along, during which participants spend a shift on patrol with a deputy, gets particularly positive feedback.

“They get to go out and see how the men and women of this department go about their business,” he said.

In another class, students engage in simulated traffic stops. According to Leikauf, there are nearly 90 different mental and physical checks a deputy does during a routine three-minute traffic stop.

Sometimes, civilians can overlook the obvious.

“It’s intense for them,” he said. “But it can be hilarious. Sometimes they forget to do the little things, like put the car in park. They ultimately get a good laugh out of it.”

Given the time and effort required for each three hour class, the passion Leikauf and the other department personnel who teach the classes have for their department can’t be faked.

“I think a lot of people can come in and put on a presentation and do what I do,” he said. “The people who came in and teach the class have a willingness to show the people of this county what we do. The presenters are proud of their department.”

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