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UNIVERSITY



Photo by Andre Ranieri

Karen Evans, crime prevention coordinator for the Springfield Police, is looking for a few good citizens to join the department's Police Academy.

Academy open to community

By Brenna Hansen
Emerald Contributor

In an effort to improve relations with the community, the Springfield Police Department is opening its police academy to the public — almost.

Twenty people will be selected to attend 33 hours of classroom and "hands-on" instruction at the Citizen Police Academy. The department is looking for Springfield residents from a variety of backgrounds, said Karen Evans, Springfield Police Department crime prevention coordinator.

"We want people from different neighborhoods, different occupations and different experiences with the police," Evans said. "In fact, we encourage people who have had a negative experience with the police to apply."

Evans said the citizen academy is designed to promote citizen awareness and understanding of the role of law enforcement. Members of the Springfield Police Department believe that citizens often have misconceptions about why they do what they do.

"I think our only experiences with law enforcement are during really stressful times, during emergency situations or because we're being cited for a traffic violation," Evans said.

The free classes are held every Tuesday from 7 to 10 p.m., March 5 through May 21. A class will not be held March 19 during spring break. Springfield Police Chief Robert Deu Pree said students must attend at least nine of the 11 classes to graduate.

Springfield is the only city in Oregon that offers a police academy for citizens; it models its program after one in Arlington, Texas.

Although it is called a police academy, the students who go through the program will not be police officers or vigilantes but will instead be more knowledgeable about police activities, Springfield Police Chief Robert Deu Pree said.

field Police Chief Robert Deu Pree said.

Ideally, he said, people who go through the program will go back into the community and share their experience with other citizens.

Evans agreed. "I think the positive spin-off is a more positive attitude about law enforcement, and they'll talk to their co-workers, family and friends and share the knowledge they have," she said.

"They will see us as human beings and not as robots in uniforms. I think people judge law enforcement by what they see on television."

The academy's curriculum includes learning about officer selection and training, riding with a patrol officer, investigating a crime scene, seeing SWAT team operations, visiting the 911 communication center, firing police firearms at a range and watching a canine unit demonstration.

A recent academy class examined evidence, including blood spatter patterns, that was used several years ago to convict Diane Downs of murder, Evans said.

People involved in the first police academy included a University student, Suzanne Cushman, and an adjunct professor, Patrick

Luciano. Although four people began the workshop with negative views of the Springfield Police Department, everyone left with a good feeling toward the police, they said.

"Twenty people came together and formed a bond with each other and the department," said Faye Brabham, a community participant.

Although the program was not initially popular with some officers and detectives in the department, most police officers support the program.

"I think initially, officers and detectives were skeptical," Evans said. "Those who participated really enjoyed it. I think it gave them an opportunity to relate with people in a positive non-stressful situation."

Applications forms may be picked up at the Springfield Police Department, 344 N. A St. The deadline to apply for the academy is 5 p.m. today.

'We want people from different neighborhoods, different occupations, and different experiences with the police. In fact, we encourage people who have had a negative experience with the police to apply.'

—Karen Evans

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