

Arming teachers might not be as simple as it's being sold

By ERIC A. HOWALD
Of the Keizertimes

In the wake of a shooting at a Florida high school that left 17 people dead last month, one of the most talked about responses has been arming school staff to deter such violence.

While the presence of more weapons might give those looking to shoot up a school more pause, there is a vast gulf between handing a teacher a gun and learning how to use it to confront an active shooter.

In an email interview with Eriks Gabliks, director of the Oregon Department of Public Safety Standards and Training (DPSST), *Keizertimes* asked what types of training current law enforcement officers receive for such scenarios to get a better understanding of what an armed teacher would need to do to prepare to confront active shooters. DPSST provides certification and training for all law enforcement officers, from guards at jails to Oregon State Police. Gabliks is also part of the Oregon School Safety Task Force.

Gabliks likened a school campus to what a law enforcement officer would encounter on a plane with a hijacker.

"It's not just about the perpetrator. It's about a dynamic situation that has many variables: time of day, location, innocent bystanders, potentially other perpetrators, what is behind or next to the perpetrator, if I shoot my weapon where will the bullet go," Gabliks said.

Gabliks stressed that DPSST provides the training required by state and federal laws only to public and private safety organizations. If a mandate were to come from the Oregon Legislature to begin arming teachers, it may not require DPSST training or its equivalents, or school staff could receive training at private ranges without any sort of public agency vetting.

"A school teacher with a gun (legally) would have no more rights or protections given to them than any other armed citizen," Gabliks said.

Still, there are many other considerations and questions that would have to be answered, he



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added. If teachers were to begin packing heat, the district's insurance company would likely have to increase coverage and premiums. Determining how weapons would be stored on the campus would be another concern.

"Off the top of my head, here are some things to consider: the school teacher that is armed is overpowered by an angry parent or student and now has a firearm; the weapon is taken from a desk drawer and used for unlawful purposes; the teacher uses the weapon and shoots an innocent bystander, a student in crisis, a first responder or a fellow employee," Gabliks said.

At DPSST, instructors work with the Department of Homeland Security's model for best practices and coordinate with state and local agencies to make sure everyone is on the same page. Additionally DPSST follows the work of national organizations and culls from the insight produced in trade journals, conferences, webinars and other resources to create its response plans.

"We need to keep our staff up to date so they keep the curriculum we use and the training we offer current and relevant," Gabliks said. After earning initial certifications, officers are required to complete a certain amount of continued training hours each year.

Training for new police officers takes 16 weeks and takes place in the classroom and through hands-on environments. About half of the training takes place in a classroom, but it only begins once recruits have passed through rigorous background checks and physical and psychological screenings – none of which are required for teaching.

Once recruits are attending the academy, role-playing becomes a major component of how they learn.

"One scenario we use involves making what is

called a high risk vehicle stop. Making the vehicle stop follows a specific procedure but to give new officers complex problem solving opportunities we add things such as a school bus coming down the street, people on a sidewalk or sitting on a bench who walk up to the area and start recording the incident on their phone, and other variables. We don't specifically focus on active shooter in basic but we do allocate a lot of our regional training effort to this important topic," Gabliks said.

Generous support by Oregon's elected officials has ensured that the training facility the agency has is top-notch. Gabliks said DPSST has received visitors from almost every state in the nation and six other countries who hope to model their facilities on Oregon's. Active shooter classes take place in real venues, like schools and office complexes, that officers might be called to for service.

Emotional survival is also a component of what is taught at DPSST. Confrontations with an active shooter on a school campus could rapidly take turns no one predicted in the chaos that ensues. Aside from the stress of the moment, DPSST is working to create programs that prepare and help officers recover from the at times horrific nature of their jobs.

Gabliks said five officers in the past three years have died by suicide in part because of trauma from their job. To help combat the issue, Oregon is taking a page from firefighters and the military, both of which have developed programs generally called stress first aid.

"This program has been well received and we offer it to all newly promoted supervisors and managers in their two week training program at the Academy. We are expanding it now into the basic police course. The concept is that if you co-worker doesn't seem to be themselves ask if they are okay," Gabliks said.

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— Eriks Gabliks
DPSST director

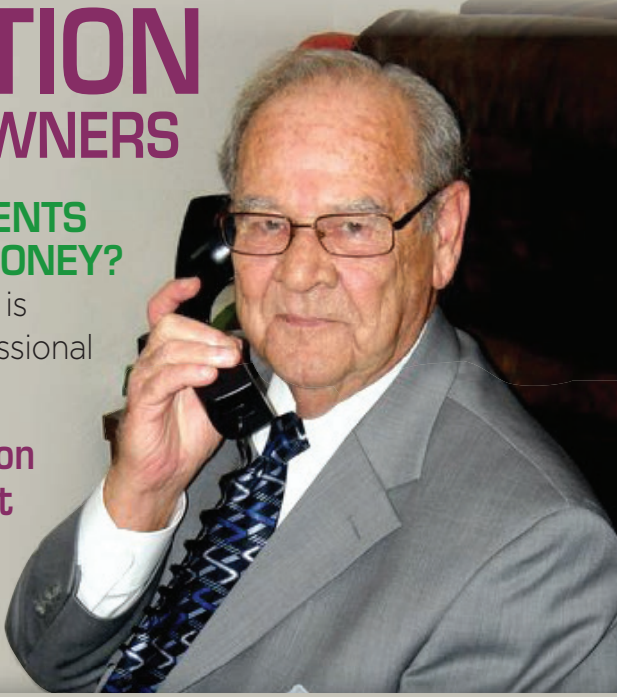
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