

Search lesson highlights risk to police

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I would make a terrible cop. I've discovered I am too easily tricked.

April 15 was my fifth class of the Morris Citizen's Police Academy. It was held at the Grundy Area Vocational Center where we were given a lesson on building searches by Patrolman Curt Kneller.

"It's a dangerous part of the job, but if you don't take the good with the bad you shouldn't be in this job," Kneller said.

After the Columbine High School massacre that occurred nine years ago this month, Kneller said police officers have been trained to conduct building searches a little differently.

In the past with school-shooting situations reporting officers did not necessarily enter the school immediately. Protocol was to call the SWAT team in.

Since Columbine the new policy, at least in Morris and its surrounding communities, is to send three officers in a "V" formation to cover each other, Kneller said. Ideally there would be six to 10 officers to enter the school, but getting 10 officers on scene in a hurry in Morris is not possible. Morris only has five officers on a night.

But with at least four officers one can close the "V" into a diamond and walk backward making sure no one sneaks up on the officers.

"If one officer is shot (in the formation) the (back) officer moves up and we keep going," Kneller said.

Morris has not had much trouble at Morris High School, he said, but with 10 percent of the city's population there eight hours a day, officers need to be trained properly.

"People say, 'it's not going to happen in Morris,' but Columbine was a town smaller than Morris," Kneller said.

Cops and robbers

After a crash-course on how to enter a closed-door room when conducting a search, the students participated in a building search drill using air-soft guns. Basically it was an adult game of cops and robbers, which I must say was my favorite game as a child. I was always the robber, but this time I had no choice but to play the cop.

It is important to note that I have never in my life handled any sort of weapon other than a water gun. OK, maybe my dad's BB gun when I was a kid, but definitely not without my dad's hands covering mine on the gun.

So, due to my inexperience, I must admit I was very nervous. The task of opening the door, running in and clearing the room and finding the "bad guy" was a lot to handle while carrying a gun.

Bill Meyer was one of the first brave ones to volunteer to do the first search.

"We're both dead," Meyer said as he returned less than two minutes later. I knew this was not a good sign for me.

Thank goodness the "bad guy" was a target stuck onto a portable board because I missed it several times.

As if that wasn't embarrassing enough in front of Kneller and the visiting alumni, I was then tricked by an old man!

Once we mastered the one room search we were then required to search a portion of the GAVC building. Fake weapon in my holster, AKA my pocket, my partner Jen Wynn and I headed through the halls.

Upon making a left by the bathrooms we found one of the alumni laying on the ground with his hand under his side.

"Oh good, please help me," he said.

My first response being the sucker that I am, "Sir are you OK?"

Pow! I was shot by his fellow bad guy before I even saw him turn the corner.

Lesson learned: don't trust old men.

Honestly, it just proves that an officer's job is unpredictable and always dangerous. Next week's class is on traffic stops. We get to actually conduct one on some Morris police officers.

I'm hoping to learn some tips on how to suck-up when you are pulled over. Unfortunately I get pulled over more than I'd like to admit.

Listen to Reporter Christina Chapman discuss issues concerning the Southwest area at 4:40 p.m. Wednesdays on WJOL-AM (1340).

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