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Civilian police academy coming to Holden

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Police shows have been a television staple since the medium invented.

If that's your kind of viewing, you can live the drama first hand when the Holden Police Department brings back their popular Civilian Police Academy, where residents learn the hows and whys of modern law enforcement.

Whether you're attracted to the high tech forensics of CSI, the artlessly inquisitive tactics of Detective Columbo or the gritty drama of Hill St. Blues, Police Chief George Sherrill promises the academy will provide something that appeals to your interest.

"The academy is for anyone who has an interest in police work and wants to learn about it," Sherrill said.

The academy was started in the 1990s and held at Wachusett Regional High School for a number of years, Sherrill said. Classes were suspended for a few years while the high school and the Public Safety Building were under construction.

This year's academy will be held for six to eight weeks in the 40-person classroom-style training room in the Public Safety Building. Classes are two to three hours long and address a different topic every week.

"The first class is going to be an introduction. That first night we really want to hear from people there and we want to get an idea of the particular areas of interest class members have. Then we can mold the class to the group's interest," Sherrill said.

Past classes have been very interested in the CSI type of police work, he said, learning the real life possibilities of a science-based criminal investigation.

Each class will be taught by a different officer, according to their areas of expertise, so class members will get a detailed look at many aspects of policing.

It's possible the class will be interested in learning about police weapons, Sherrill said.

"Why do officers carry guns, and why those particular firearms? That's a subject that people may be interested in," Sherrill said.

Learning won't be limited to the classroom. Field trips are part of the curriculum. A trip to the House of Correction in West Boylston not only shows the nuts and bolts of running a correctional facility, but can demonstrate new technology, like retinal scanners that can be used in addition to fingerprinting to identify criminals.

Another planned destination is the State Police Academy in New Braintree. Due to an aging force, the academy is fielding a class of 250 recruits this year, offering Holden police academy a unique look into the making of a law enforcement officer.

Another insider look at policing can take place during ride-a-longs with a Holden officer.

"In the past, we had class members go out with officers in patrol cars. They can see how a motor stop is conducted and learn why certain procedures are followed," Sherrill said.

It's also a good chance to look at the technology including computers, that is available in police vehicles.

"When I started, we had a blue light and a siren," Sherrill joked.

The academy will also attempt to dispel some of the myths – especially ones found on the Internet – that are firmly held by some members of the public.

"Some people believe that if police are following a female driver at night, then she can proceed to a well –lighted area before she pulls over," Sherrill said.

Not true, as it turns out.

The class will also cover Internet crime and vulnerability, and minimizing risk.

"The civilian academy is good for the department because we get to interact with the public on a positive note," Sherrill said. "When police deal with people, it's usually because something is wrong. We've made a lot of loyal friends through our previous academies. It's good community policing."

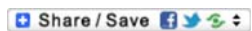
Sherrill hopes to have at least 15 people sign up for the class. In past years, they have had about 25 residents enroll. They've been old, young, male and female, he said.

Folks only have to show up with a pad of paper or a laptop. There's no testing, no certification to worry about.

"This is just for their own curiosity and fulfillment," Sherrill said.

Dates for the academy will be set as soon as the chief musters a class of 15 residents. Call Chief Sherrill at 508-829-4444 or email gsherrill@townofHolden.net.

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