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Citizens police academy returns from hiatus

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La Porte's Citizens Police Academy is back.

After a 3-year hiatus, Police Chief Kenith Adcox has reinstated the popular course. The latest class of 20 finished the 14-week program with a graduation ceremony April 7.

The three-hour weekly classes touches on everything from animal control to S.W.A.T. (Special Weapons and Tactics) Team.

Daryl Leonard, a La Porte High School automotive technology teacher who attended the class with his wife, Becky Leonard, said he was impressed by the S.W.A.T. Team's demonstration of "flash bang" grenades.

Their bright light and loud noise can distract suspects while officers enter a potentially dangerous area.

"They took us over to the fire building and set off flash-bangs in there," Leonard said. "That will disorient just about anyone. And we were outside the building."

Leonard said he and his wife, a La Porte High School teacher's assistant, finished the class with a better understanding of what officers go through every day.

"We got to see them on a more personal basis," he said.

Judging by the positive feedback from other participants, Det. John Krueger, La Porte Police Department spokesman, said it won't be hard to fill the next class.

"I'd say, more than anything, the citizens are happy to see it start back up," Krueger said.

"It was a program that was really active," he said. "I don't have an answer as to why it fell by the wayside. The chief we have now is all about community involvement, so his pushing it helps, obviously."

The next session is expected to start in August, but it's not decided yet whether it will be an advanced class or another round of basic training, Krueger said.

Dawn Anderson, secretary to City Manager Ron Bottoms and Assistant City Manager John Joerns, also attended the last Citizens Police Academy.

“I just thought it would be a great opportunity to learn about what the police officers actually do,” said Anderson, a La Porte resident.

“I realized that each officer has many hats,” she said. “They’re not just patrol officers but do other duties, too.”

Both Anderson and Leonard talked about riding with officers in squad cars during one of their last sessions.

“We got to see them pull over people and tell them, ‘Hey, you have a taillight out,’ or, ‘You rolled through a stop sign,’” she said. “It was as if we were pulling them over, also,” Anderson said. “It gives you a different outlook on it. How do you handle the situation? Do you pull out your flashlight if it’s dark?”

Anderson said she was also amazed at the uniform worn by the department’s two bomb squad technicians.

“It weighs over 100 pounds,” she said. “And that’s not even carrying the kit.”

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