

Local police agencies come together to train for active shooter

Written by Janna Ross

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What would happen if a shooter went inside the local school or a local business and decided to harm children or employees?

That question has been pondered recently by the local police departments. And actually, has been answered.

Most local police officers have been trained in Active Shooter scenarios with the most recent training session being held on Sunday, March 15 at Jeffersonville High School. Officers with the Sellersburg Police Department and the Charlestown Police Department joined officers from the Jeffersonville Police Department for the training.

The Active Shooter training held locally is instructed by Cpl. Glen Jackson and Lt. Chris Grimm of the Jeffersonville Police Department. The duo traveled to Owensboro, Kentucky in 2007 for their own Active Shooter Training and returned to Southern Indiana as instructors. Since that time the two have diligently worked to ensure that most local police officers were trained together in the Active Shooter training. Training the first year was held at Jeffersonville High School while last year officers converged on Charlestown High School for their training sessions.

Active Shooter training begins with the officers in a classroom setting. The first half of the day, approximately four hours, has the officers watching a video regarding the 1999 Columbine High School shooting, learning from power points and then taking what they have learned into movement drills.

Jackson, who was not in the classroom this training session, recalled what had occurred in the past training sessions.

"In the past, the spin of reality is what the officers gain. They usually never think about it the way the parents in that video throw it back to the police," Jackson stated.

While the video was being played, Jackson was talking with a couple of local officers who plan on attending training to also become Active Shooter Training Instructors.

After the first half of the training, the officers truly put what they have learned to work. From the classroom training, they move into scenario training.

The most recent training included the other half of the officers from Charlestown and Sellersburg Police Departments. Half of the officers were trained last year when the training was offered at Charlestown High School.

To ensure the training be as realistic as possible, role players are used to be victims, hostages and just people in the wrong place at the wrong time. This training had most of the Jeffersonville High School Honor Society acting as the role players along with students from the Criminal Justice Department from Ivy Tech, along with Professor Leonard Gardenour.

Jackson explained why the training is held locally in different schools.

"The first reason we conduct the training in the school is because of the children and the second reason is what business can shut down an entire day to let law enforcement come in and take over and shoot each other," Jackson stated.

The training at Jeffersonville High had officers searching for the 'bad guy' for their scenario training. Officers were divided into teams that their main goal was to find the subject and contain him.

The bad guy was portrayed by Jeffersonville Police Department's Isaac Parker and Sellersburg Police Department's Darin Broady.

"They both did a great job with the training. We have no idea where they are. That's all part of it. We have to go in and find the shooter just like if it was a real scene," Jackson added.

Although the training is in the school, Jackson was quick to explain that the scenarios would

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also work in a business setting.

“This is not just confined to schools, the same type of response would also be used at a workplace,” Jackson added.

Jackson continued about the training, “All agencies with officers that have been through the basic training, every one is on the same page. That helps on man power issues, the more guys we have go through the training, the less difficulty there will be in the likelihood of an active shooter event. This is a great example of different agencies working together.

The Clark County Sheriff’s Office has also worked the training scenarios with Jeffersonville, Sellersburg and Charlestown Police Officers in the past.

Jackson added about the inter-department training.

“It doesn’t happen often, you have seen what we do with the K-9 teams and now SWAT is following and now it’s happening with the Active Shooter Training with patrol officers,” Jackson explained. “My thoughts are, if this were to really happen at Jeff High it would take every officer in Southern Indiana to do what we have to do. We have to have a team of officers to clear the building, work traffic, have officers off site with the media and also have officers working the city for the police coverage, although at that point it would be emergency calls only. That’s just a few of the ways we would need manpower. It would take every available officer to actually take care of this. We have trained with Floyd County and New Albany SWAT teams, it’s not hard to get the patrol officers to do the training, we have also worked with the State Police with the training. We have worked with everyone besides Clarksville Police.”

Charlestown Police Sgt. Darren Baker attended the training session last Sunday.

“Hands down it was one of the best training I have ever been to. All officers had the same reaction. We need more training like it. We had role players that made the training so real that it gave me cold chills,” Baker explained.

Baker is adding to his training as he is an integral part of Charlestown’s training sessions currently.

“This training just helps me out. Now I am the Firearms Instructor, Machine Gun Instructor and SWAT Commander. The tactics learned go hand-in-hand. A lot of the tactics I can use on the firing range and it is just giving me more knowledge to pas on to the SWAT team and the entire police department,” Baker added.

Baker tried to explain the feeling he had during the training scenario.

“It’s just an adrenaline rush. It’s so realistic. The intense instruction makes your adrenaline begin pumping. It’s so unreal,” an enthusiastic Baker explained.

Baker’s wife and mother-in-law were also involved in the training as the two were role players. Baker said his wife now understands his job a little better.

“I’m glad I went. Now I have more understanding of why you train the way you do and why you train as much as you do,” Baker explained what his wife had told him after the Sunday training session. “She said she was just in awe of the realistic aspect of the training.”

The training that each officer is completing is a well-thought out plan by the local police agencies.

“The goal is for all agencies in Clark County to have the same Active Shooter training. That way you know when you have different officers from all different agencies across the area, showing up, you know they are trained and ready to help,” Baker explained.

He continued, “It’s not just the police officers who benefit from this type of training. It’s the public, the school systems, students and parents. We had 50 police officers in Charlestown High last March. Almost every officer in Clark County has the same training.”

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Baker offered training to another local department.

"If Clarksville (Police) wants training for their officers I know Charlestown, Sellersburg and Jeffersonville Police will happily come in and train them on the basic Active Shooter training."

Baker also explained a recent training session he and fellow officer, Brion Gilbert completed at Northaven Elementary School.

"This is something that Glen started. Gilbert and I went to Northaven School to help out and teach the school staff and students what to do. We can teach them why a contact team steps over a wounded kid," Baker stated. "I believe every school in Clark County should take the training. I know Jeff city officers are in contact with Clark County Schools administration to get all that lined out."

Baker continued about the training at the elementary school, "We even had those who were not so supportive in the beginning, see it differently at the end of the day. They told us, wow you all did a great job. They then understood a little better why things are done in the order they are done."

Baker also conducted training this past Sunday. March 22, at River Crossing in Charlestown.

"We are training this Sunday also. River Crossing is a nice setting for training. We also went to DA two years ago. I have not been in the building since but I remember the exact lay-out of the office and warehouse. Once you have spent a day training in a building you will remember where things are."

Charlestown Chief Steve Dean also received some of the Active Shooter Training at Jeff High. He was quick to explain why he thought it was important for the Charlestown officers to attend the training session.

"We want to send officers in prepared instead of standing by and saying what should I do," Dean explained. "We try to plan ahead, we see a trend and we move forward and being prepared. Rather it be a school shooting, a drug investigation or whatever, we want to be pro-active not reactive."

Dean agreed with his Sgt. (Baker) about the benefit of the training.

"It was excellent. No question when you get there you know what you need to do. We would like to do it later and get everyone else involved, EMTs, fire departments, and the schools to participate as well. The Columbine film definitely got attention in the beginning," Dean stated. "It was very well done. That was one of my first goals last year was to get the Active Shooter training. Glen and those guys were more than happy to help."

The idea of getting many other agencies in Clark County involved in Active Shooter training is one many officers have been working on getting accomplished. Jackson has tentatively set that type of training up for this summer.

"We are wanting to do a larger scale training this summer, like in July. That training would include fire, EMS and school systems. It would be an Advanced Course of Patrol Response to Active Shooting Training," Jackson explained.

Baker added about the advanced course, "I am all for it. The advanced would allow us to add to what we already know. Advanced would give us more tactics and more knowledge."

Dean simply concluded, "In today's economic times it's not just one department and our department but many police officers and police departments training together. The world is going to get worse before it gets better. Burglaries are going to go up, the crime rate is going to go up. Our police department, along with Sellersburg Police and Jeffersonville Police are doing what we need to do to better prepare ourselves."

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Preparation is key to any situation and Dean is not taking that for granted. Neither is Sellersburg Chief Russ Whelan.

The two chiefs are sending officers to Active Shooter training courses to allow them to become instructors like Jackson and Grimm.

"I think it is very important to be prepared and that is going to help us long term," Dean explained about the decision to send the officers to the training.

The training will be held in New Jersey on April 13-15. Charlestown Officers Baker and Gilbert along with Sellersburg Officer Broady are planning to attend the training to become instructors.

Whelan agreed that the more prepared the police agencies can be the better everyone will be.

"This was the second time we had this type of training. Both times I have been very thankful to the Jeffersonville Police Department for the training they offered. Now we are wanting to make it (the training) on a bigger scale and that's why I want to send Darin to the training to become an instructor," Whelan stated.

According to Whelan, there are two advantages to having an Active Shooter Training Instructor in the department.

"There are two advantages to having one of the guys being an instructor, one, with our own instructor we can do the Active Shooter Training on a much smaller scale here at the department and two, we can use the additional instructor to assist Jeff PD on the bigger scale especially when we are wanting to do the larger scale training this summer, it's just a win-win situation for me," Whelan explained.

Whelan went on to explain why he chose Officer Broady to attend the Active Shooter Training Instructor course.

"Broady is on the SWAT team already. He is one of our tactical officers and he's the firearms instructor for our department," Whelan said. "It just fit to send him to the training with the other officers from Charlestown."

Whelan agreed with the other officers about the recent Active Shooter Training he received at Jeffersonville High School.

"I think the training was great. Some of the most realistic training I've ever been through. The training is the closest to be in the situation without actually being in it. With the fire alarms going off and the sounds of the scene, it's the most realistic training I've been through in my entire career."

He concluded, "Until Columbine there was no need for this type of training. All police agencies learned a hard lesson from Columbine. I am glad that all the local agencies are working together for this training. If this type of situation occurs you know other agencies are going to show up. When we are training it's not just Jeffersonville, Charlestown or Sellersburg on a team. My four person team only had one other Sellersburg officer, I had one from Charlestown and one guy from Jeff on my team. When you go in as a team, you just know you have to handle it. Everybody is there for the same purpose, to save lives, most likely children's lives. The color of your uniform and the name of your department is thrown out the door with a situation like that. This training brings all that to life."