



Citizen's Arrest

A sobering first day

By *Laurie Lenten*
SPECIAL TO THE
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Columnist Laurie Lenten has joined the first-ever Rhinelander Citizens' Police Academy. She will be writing about her experiences for the Star Journal, and will be filing weekly reports.



As I gathered my things to walk out the door Tuesday evening, my husband said, "Aren't you taking a pad of paper?" When I replied in the negative, he added, "You can take one of my small notebooks if you want."

I declined his offer with sincere thanks, but I was going in paperless, which for me is akin to leaving the house without pants. I was armed with only my purse, a pen and a really good cappuccino. The procurement of said cappuccino nearly rendered me late to my class, but a girl's gotta do what a girl's gotta do.

Arriving at the Rhinelander Police Department, I edged my way into the last remaining curbside parking space, making darned sure I wasn't in the handicap spot. I was greeted by an empty reception area, but quickly spotted someone moving around behind the darkened glass. Not being the bashful sort, I hollered "hello" and a few seconds later a very pregnant woman greeted me.

"You must be Laurie," she said, and I marveled out loud at her psychic abilities as she led me to the training room where I grabbed a seat and got ready to begin my first night of Citizens' Police Academy.

When my editor asked if I'd be interested in going to (and writing about) the Rhinelander Police Department's first ever Citizens' Police Academy, the words that popped out of my mouth were, "Do I get to carry a gun?" He assured me that I most probably wouldn't, but I took the assignment anyway.

All gun play aside, I jumped on this one because, in nearly three decades of writing, I've never forayed into the world of law enforcement. A Citizens' Police Academy piqued my interest. Here was my chance to infiltrate that unknown world that cops inhabit, and ask the tough

questions. I had the wind knocked out of my sails when the evening's discussion took a turn toward the dark side, but let me digress.

Police Chief Mike Steffes greeted our group of eight-five men and three women ranging in age from 18 to 55—and then went on to give us an outline of the Citizens' Police Academy, after which time we moseyed on over to the death portion of the program.

This was when we signed release forms. We agreed that: 1) we will not interfere with official police work; 2) we are not trained police officers, even though we were given green T-shirts emblazoned with the words "Citizens' Police Academy" (we're CPAs?); and 3) we understand that things can go wrong that could result in our deaths.

I made a mental note to discuss this little hidden clause with my editor, who had assured me nothing but fun and chuckles (and doughnuts) on this assignment.

Chief Steffes and Sergeant Becky Miller, who turned out to be the very pregnant woman who had greeted me, shared real world accounts of real world officers giving their lives in the line of duty.

We were shown videos of officers being shot and, yes, killed while performing their duty. Truthfully, I was more than a bit shocked.

I had to think about it for the better part of a day before I could write about it. Why, I wondered? Why begin a Citizens' Police Academy with vivid visual accounts of officers dying?

Why?

It slowly dawned on me. When most of us go to work, we can rest assured that more than likely we're going to walk through the doors of our homes at the end of the day and be with our families. Police officers don't have that assurance...ever.

Of course, most officers get through their careers without a hitch, but just living with knowing that death could be right behind the next door you knock on has to be a most wearing daily experience.

While Officer Josh Pudlowski closed out the session with an extremely in-depth and knowledgeable drug presentation, I have to admit I was working on processing the images I had seen.

It was a most sobering realization, which is what I think the next month holds in store.

(Editor's note: Columnist Laurie Lenten is participating in the first Rhinelander Citizens' Police Academy, and is filing weekly reports on her experience.)