



Citizen's Arrest

All good things must come to an end

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SPECIAL TO THE
STAR JOURNAL



As I sat at the Citizens Police Academy graduation ceremony, held on Tuesday evening at the Rhinelander-Oneida County Airport, I had to chuckle to myself as I remembered back to a time in my life when I was pegged an out-of-control child. By my 12th year of life, I was a hardened repeat offender.

I had been brought up on multiple charges of nosiness and lacking proper self-control in an educational setting starting at the tender young age of 5, but I knew they were all bum raps. The people trying to contain me had given me access to a dictionary, so I knew what the words "curious" and "inquisitive" meant.

What they called "being disruptive in class" I called wanting to know what the kid at the next desk was doing, and more importantly, what was going down on the playground at recess. I wanted to know the who, what, when, where, and why's of everything and everyone. I was lectured, threatened, incarcerated and subjected to corporal punishment at the hands of my captors, but I stubbornly failed to reform.

What can I say, except that I still love leaning over my desk and asking the guy next to me, "Whatcha doin'?" and the Citizens Police Academy has been one very big whatcha doin' experience. I think I can speak for my classmates when I say that we, as a class, collectively, learned a lot and had a great time to boot.

I probably can't speak for the officers when I say that they had a good time, too, but what are they going to do about it—arrest me? Oh, Lord, this is one of the benefits of a Citizens Police Academy...there are endless opportunities for lame cop jokes and jibes. There's also the added benefit of being able to say all of the weird stuff that you wouldn't dare say during a traffic stop. Believe me, there have been more doughnut jokes than I care to recall.

And speaking of doughnuts, here's an interesting and little known fact about the Rhinelander Police Department (RPD)—very few of the officers drink coffee. No wonder they're not eating doughnuts. What's a doughnut without coffee? To my knowledge, only Sergeant Jeff Melau drinks the stuff. Speaking on the condition of anonymity, two sources within the department said emphatically that no one goes near the sergeant until he's had his morning coffee. Did I mention that the sergeant is also the department's firearms instructor? (See, Officer

Mertz, there is a very good reason for these non-descript media words like "anonymous sources." They protect people. Good luck.)

Okay, then, we'll move right along now to Chief Mike Steffes, who now has the added benefit of 10 more people calling him "Chief." I think I can speak once again for my classmates when I say that we've been talking behind the Chief's back on more than one occasion. (Sorry guys that I had to narc you out.) We've decided that a Citizens Police Academy is about the best thing to hit town since...go ahead fill in the blank...since automobiles, hot running water, cream cheese?

No, seriously, we've got a lot going for us in our community—it's a great place to live and raise a family—and a Citizens Police Academy only serves to add yet another dimension to our city's image.

I don't know about you, but when one of my kids quickly shuts a bedroom door when I'm approaching, my suspicion level rises. "What are you up to?" is the first question out of my mouth. I think it works the same with government and public departments. When the doors close, suspicions rise.

Which is why Mayor Richard Johns and the city council need to be commended for approving a test run of a Citizens Police Academy. Let's face it, opening doors can be a risky business. It takes courage and forward thinking to try something new, but I think if Mayor Johns' broad smile and hearty handshake on Tuesday night were any indicator, he's pretty pleased with what he has seen developing over at the police department.

And speaking of the police department, where would any of this be if not for the hard work and organizational skills of Academy Coordinator Sergeant Becky Miller? We've held our collective breath these past weeks as the very pregnant Sgt. Miller shows up class after class. We finally just started ordering her to sit and stay, which she's not to fond of doing, but we told her that eight Packer fans far outweigh one Vikings fan...but then again maybe we don't. (Can I say that Barclay over at WJFW-Channel 12 inspired that one, Sgt. Miller? I think you ought to tazer him.)

Last, but not least, we in the academy extend our thanks to Chief Deputy John Sweeney, Sheriff Jeff Hoffman and Judge Mark Mangerson for giving of their time. And thank you to Metro Screenprinting, Nicolet Technical College, the Rhinelander Water Department, Wal-Mart, Rouman Cinema, BucketHeads, Dairy Queen, Culvers, and McDonalds for services and door prizes.

For more information on the next Citizens Police Academy, call Chief Mike Steffes at 365-5300. His door is always open.

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