

Calling all recruits

Civilian Police Academy gears up for another class

BY LIZ FINNEGAN

SUFFOLK COUNTY—More than 300 Suffolk County residents have completed a program that links average citizens with Suffolk County police officers. The Civilian Police Academy is a free, comprehensive 16-week program that provides an up-close look at law enforcement in our county. A new class is beginning in March and so the academy is now beginning to accept applications.

Kevin O'Hare of Kings Park took the course years ago and is now the president of the Suffolk County CPA Alumni Association that's composed of a good number of active members. He said the purpose of attending one of the classes is to "let people know what police go through on a daily basis."

CPA was founded in 1992. Officer Mitch Savino, the current coordinator of the program, noted that it was created as a way to open the lines of communication between police and the community, and helps those who go through the classes learn what their police can and cannot do.

Savino and O'Hare emphasized that CPA is in no way an auxiliary police force. It is just a program that allows the public to experience several areas of law enforcement procedures, such as homicide, marine bureau, the canine force, emergency services and highway. There are a number of field trips in the program, which include accompanying officers in a police car on a tour of duty, visiting precincts and attending a demonstration at the police firearms range.

"They get to play the role of a police officer in a controlled environment," Savino added.

"I like to listen to the officers and we can ask them anything," said O'Hare. "People [who have attended the pro-

gram] bring in their family members. They love it."

CPA alumna Marge Thornton, of Islip, is the mother of a Suffolk County police officer. She and her husband signed on for the class after an incident at their home.

"We were burglarized in 2009, and [subsequently] heard that the Third Precinct held monthly meetings for the community," she said. It was at one of those meetings where the Thorntons met CPA members and decided to attend the next class.

"They showed us every area in the police department and we found it so fascinating," she added.

Savino said that recruits come from all backgrounds, such as the medical field and clergy; even elected officials have completed the program, including Islip Supervisor Angie Carpenter and DuWayne Gregory, presiding officer of the Suffolk County Legislature.

"The inside look at police procedure the Civilian Police Academy gave me has been invaluable in my role as a public official and advocate," said Gregory. "I would recommend this program to anyone looking to expand their knowledge base and help their community."

Carpenter took the course more than 12 years ago when she was a legislator. "When I heard about it, I thought that would be really interesting," she said. "It was awesome."

Carpenter said visiting the various police departments, such as the 911 dispatchers, and the role-playing that was part of the course gave her a more in-depth look at what police officers do and also a greater appreciation of their work.

"This course should be on everyone's bucket list," she added.

In addition to police work, recruits can become certified in CPR, AED and to administer Narcan. "They walk away with



some great information," Savino said. "I really believe in this program."

The classes meet weekly for 16 weeks at the police academy. Each class is around three hours long. Once the program is completed, the alumni continue their association with the SCPD through meetings that are held several times a year, as well as working together on charitable causes such as Thanksgiving turkey distributions. "We do a lot of outreach," Savino noted.

"People like the camaraderie," said O'Hare. "And this is good for the community," Thornton added.

Anyone interested in attending CPA should be at least 21; other than that there is no age restriction. Candidates would need to be a resident of Suffolk County and will be subject to a background check. Applications are available at local police precincts or by calling 631-853-7000 or by email, mitch.savino@suffolkcountyny.gov. ■