

## FOCUS ON

### Police and Fire Citizens Academies: Going backstage with public safety

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There are enough police and firefighter shows on TV for anyone to think they can be an expert at crime scene forensics or rescue a child from a 10-story burning building, but the professionals who do these jobs for a living everyday can attest that it's not as easy (or entertaining) as it looks on screen.

To give Gwinnett residents a real-world, behind-the-scenes view of their public safety operations, both the Gwinnett County Police and Fire and Emergency Services departments offer citizens academies. These academies give residents a snapshot of the many roles our police officers and firefighters play in keeping us safe 24/7. Many of the participants also discover that they, too, can play a part in the lifesaving efforts of our public safety departments.



*Citizens Police Academy participants get a first-hand glimpse into the training that Gwinnett Police provides to new recruits and experienced officers.*

Police Department staff spends six hours a week for nine weeks giving participants of the Citizens Police Academy a glimpse of police work in Gwinnett. The classes are taught by instructors from department's Training Section as well as by adjunct instructors throughout the department. *"Our citizen academy participants get a taste of the training that our officers receive as police academy recruits and throughout their careers,"* said Cpl. **Daniel Arrendale**, Citizen Police Academy coordinator. *"Training is critically important to this department and we stress this in our citizens academy."*

Participants don't just sit in classrooms and listen to lectures; they get to tour police facilities, observe a K-9 demonstration, and see a reenactment of a police pullover. In addition, they take part in the firearms training system that uses computer-generated imagery to simulate shoot/don't shoot situations. *"Many people don't realize how intense those situations can be until they experience it first-hand through the simulator,"* Arrendale said.

Academy participants also get to learn about other functions in the police department, including Crime Prevention, Aviation, SWAT, Crime Scene Investigations, and Communications/E-911.

Once residents complete the Citizens Police Academy, they have the opportunity to join the alumni association. Alumni association members receive additional training, participate in police academy recruit training, and may also be a part of search teams coordinated with the Police Department. *"Being a part of the alumni association gives academy graduates an opportunity to stay connected to their police department while giving back to their community,"* Arrendale said.

Over at the Fire and Emergency Services Department, the Citizens Fire Academy is held for 12 weeks and gives participants a hands-on lesson in firefighting and emergency medical response from the folks who do it every day. Classes are taught by certified firefighters and paramedics and provide valuable fire and life safety information along with an overview of the department.

Each week, academy participants visit different fire stations to learn about special operations, such as Swift



*Citizens Fire Academy participants spend 12 weeks learning the ins and outs of firefighting and emergency medical response.*

Water Rescue, Technical Rescue, and Hazardous Materials. In addition, they get to visit the Fire Academy facility, which consists of a burn building, training tower, and classrooms; participate in drills similar to those taught to recruits in the Fire Academy; and spend a few hours with firefighters and paramedics on the job during an actual ride-a-long opportunity.

*"It can be an eye-opening experience for our citizens academy participants when they get fully dressed in our gear and have to walk up multiple flights of stairs while their view is limited by smoke," said Lt. **Sylvia Goalen**, Community Risk Reduction section. "Many of them have a new appreciation for the work our first responders do to keep us all safe."*

Participants also learn firsthand the challenges faced by medical personnel as they gain access to and treat patients in distress. All practical exercises during the CFA are conducted under simulated conditions.



*Citizens Fire Academy graduates can take part in the alumni association and volunteer for CPR classes, smoke alarm blitzes, and Safe Kids Gwinnett events.*

Citizens Fire Academy graduates have the opportunity to join the alumni association, which volunteers for CPR classes, smoke alarm blitzes, and events with Save Kids Gwinnett. *"Our alumni members are vital to helping our department carry out community risk reduction activities,"* Goalen said.

Both academies are free and open to Gwinnett residents, but they must complete an application and pass a background check to be accepted. The Citizens Police Academy is offered once a year; applications are accepted year-round and considered in the order received. Interested applicants can call 678.226.7752 or email [citizenpoliceacademy@gwinnettcountry.com](mailto:citizenpoliceacademy@gwinnettcountry.com). For more information about the Citizens Fire Academy, which is held twice each year, call 678.518.4845 or email [fireprograms@gwinnettcountry.com](mailto:fireprograms@gwinnettcountry.com).

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