

Westchester takes on police training **Aug 30, 2010**

VALHALLA — The Westchester County Department of Public Safety will start training officers countywide next month under a pilot program that aims to help local police departments save money.

Currently, Westchester departments individually bear the time and expense of providing a minimum of 21 hours of state-mandated refresher training each year to their members.

The pilot program, which will start late next month, is being offered at the Westchester Police Academy in Valhalla for up to 160 municipal officers and supervisors as well as county police. So far, six local departments have registered officers. The departments are Yonkers, Hastings-on-Hudson, Bronxville, Pleasantville, Tuckahoe and the Town of Mamaroneck.

"The training officers for 43 separate police departments in Westchester currently spend time each year developing, updating and presenting a curriculum on required topics such as legal updates, use of force and firearms, among others," said Public Safety Commissioner George Longworth, who took over the department this year. "The goal of the Unified In-Service Training Program is to eliminate this redundancy and reduce costs by offering the training as a shared service."

He said the idea won't cost the county a dime because it won't require any additional manpower or space. It is often necessary for police departments to pay overtime to officers to conduct or attend the training. Under the new model, county police will lead the instruction, and day and evening sessions are planned for added flexibility.

Tuckahoe Police Chief John Costanzo, who has enrolled six officers in the program for the fall and would enroll the rest of his department if the program is continued into next year, said it would save about \$1,400 per officer.

"It saves us a tremendous amount of overtime because we don't have to provide the instructors that we normally would for small groups of trainees," said Costanzo, president of the Westchester County Chiefs of Police Association, which assisted county police in creating the pilot. "So we save on instructors and also save by sending the officers when it's convenient for us. We can take one or two officers off the normal work schedule at a time, as opposed to paying them on their day off to go, or having to backfill their position."

The program will include a new section on confrontations in which off-duty or plainclothes officers are challenged by uniformed officers. Recruits at the police academy receive this training, which was expanded after Mount Vernon Police Officer Christopher Ridley was fatally shot by four county officers as he tried to make an off-duty arrest in White Plains in 2008. The new program will provide this training to veteran officers as well, as part of the county's commitment "to do everything possible to prevent a similar tragedy from every occurring again," Longworth said.

County Executive Robert Astorino has supported the pilot, saying it fits with his overall effort to reduce costs and save taxpayers money.

