

## Junior Police Academy cadets gain new appreciation for police work

BY JENNIFER AMATO  
Staff Writer



Members of the North Brunswick Junior Police Academy learn about a New Jersey State Police helicopter that visited the Linwood Middle School on July 29.

NORTH BRUNSWICK — Members of the North Brunswick Junior Police Academy could not decide what was more exciting: a visit from a New Jersey State Police helicopter or a visit from a German shepherd.

During the two-week academy for middle and high school students, the cadets were exposed to various aspects of law enforcement, including physical training, a visit from the FBI, a conversation with three New Jersey Department of Corrections inmates, a tour of the North Brunswick Police Department and a trip to the New Jersey State Police Museum.

On July 29, the day before graduation, the class was treated to a lesson on animal cruelty interspersed with a helicopter visit from New Jersey State Trooper Dan Carney and Sgt. Tyson Mowry.

"This year, the helicopter was new," said cadet Zachary Zimmermann.

After the helicopter ascended, Michael Azzarello of Life Training Associates of Old Bridge brought his three-year-old German shepherd Zola to meet the students, while explaining to them how unfortunately prevalent animal cruelty is.

He mentioned how members of the New Jersey Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (NJSPCA) respond to numerous situations involving various animals. Officers inspect boardwalks, horse shows, state and county fairs, circuses, animal exhibits — and especially during the summer months, parking lots, to check for pets locked in hot vehicles.

He said that violations of animal cruelty laws can result in fines, jail time, restitution payments, and even the forfeiture of the animal or banning of future ownership.

In addition, he said that children under 18 may undergo a psychological evaluation because "if you commit a crime of animal cruelty, the chances of you committing a major crime ... is high.

Showing photos of dogs and birds that are involved in animal fighting upset the room, including 14-year-old Autumn Torres.

Azzarello mentioned how spring poles and chains are used to strengthen the mouths and necks of dogs, respectively; how fights involve not just the animals but usually illegal gambling, weapons, drugs and violence; that the losing dogs and sometimes even the winning dogs are strangled, hanged, shot or abandoned; how puppies are stolen for use as practice dogs; and that cock fighting happens as close to home as New Brunswick and Old Bridge.

"It made me a little upset to see the animals are [hurt] really bad," Torres said, noting that her goal is to enter law enforcement in order to help animals.

"You're actually helping the community in a way. Helping these dogs, people probably look at you like you're a hero. You protect them," she said.

Besides the animal cruelty lecture, Torres said she also enjoyed visiting the New Jersey State Police Point Pleasant Marine Police Station, where she and her fellow cadets were able to ride out on boats, and the trip to the state museum to learn about the history of policing.

Zimmermann, 16, has also had great experiences for the past six years he has taken part in the academy.

He was once again impressed by the annual visit to the New Jersey State Police Academy in Sea Girt, especially since the North Brunswick Junior Police Academy prompted his desire to become a military policeman for the U.S. Navy or Air Force.

"Cops need a lot more respect than they actually get," Zimmermann said. Their job is very demanding. In this day and age, cops are kind of thrown under the bus ... and no one appreciates them."

"[The Junior Police Academy] shows the kind of everyday person an officer is. They're there to make you safe."

He said the exposure of youth to police work is advantageous "to get the right mindset so you don't develop bad thoughts or beliefs that police are there to hurt you. They're there to protect you."

With the quote, "If you fail to train, you train to fail" written in large letters on the classroom chalkboard, the lessons learned are exactly what Police Officer Joseph Grasso, Police Officer John Hanrahan and Linda Warhaftig of the North Brunswick First Aid & Rescue Squad hoped for from the 29 cadets.

"I believe in this program. I've been involved in this program long enough to see these cadets grow into young men and women," Grasso said. "It makes you feel good when you see they are doing something with their lives."