

INSIGHT

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Police training changes according to times

Training

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coln Police officer, Alvin Banks played football for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and majored in business administration.

Banks said he saw the negative influences that teen-agers grew up under, and he wanted to change that.

As he was explaining, Banks received a surprise from his girlfriend Rachael — a bouquet of six roses. Banks, a tall man with stealth black hair, grinned sheepishly and turned away from his teasing friends.

The mood of the students is casual and not much different from a college classroom. After putting their hands on a pop can — part of their fingerprinting exercise — they try their Air Jordan techniques by throwing the cans across the room into the collector's box.

Shane Schwarz dusted his Diet Dr. Pepper can, but nothing showed up.

"What am I doing wrong?" he said, staring at the can for an answer. "Well, I never was any good at painting."

Schwarz, a future officer with the Overton Police Department, picked up a different brush.

"Oh yeah, this is a lot better. Look at those coming up on there!"

In the evening, after a few stifled yawns during a driver safety video, students cheer when "Home Improvement" comes on. The students watched homicide videos a week before.

The casual attitude in class is a stress reliever, Schwarz said, and no matter how many jokes are made, the officers realize the seriousness of their jobs.

Robert Butler had his head buried in a thick three-ring binder during a break in his traffic safety night class.

The transition to the gravity and severity of their field work depended on control, he said. As students, he said, they were still learning under the control of an instructor.

"But when you go into a situation, you have to be in control of the situation," he said. "People are looking for leadership, and they're looking toward you."

Until then, he will build up his own leadership skills at the center.

Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays begin with 6:15 a.m. physical training. Tuesdays and Thursdays start with room-inspection checks, where a smudge on the mirror calls for reproach.

The first few weeks are filled with academic classes from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. and sometimes

a night class from 6 to 10 p.m.

They study 516 hours in academic and practical lessons in legal aspects, patrol, officer survival, investigation, human understanding and traffic operations.

They are allowed to leave at night, but must be back by 11 p.m. Students can go home on weekends.

"What do we do for fun? Laundry. We went to Wal-Mart the other night. That was exciting," Traci Bosen managed to say with a straight face.

Bosen, who is training as a Sarpy County Sheriff's deputy, said students were too busy studying to go out on weeknights. But by 6 p.m. Friday, she said, the parking lot was empty.

"Everyone goes home," she said. "You'd go insane if you didn't."

An album filled with graduation photographs sits on the table in a darkened library. In the early 1960s, the photos are dominated by white males. Not until the 1970s do women and minorities appear in the pictures.

When they graduate March 31, the 122nd Basic's photograph will reflect male and female officers ages 21 to 60 from various racial backgrounds.

Students said they realized the impact the Renteria incident and the indictments of Lincoln police officers had on the image of Nebraska's law enforcement. The incident reflected a growing concern for multicultural training and police force.

"I think everyone wants justice," Butler said. "But you have to go a step beyond. You want everything to be fair and equal, but when it goes out of tilt, you look for someone to blame."

Two future LPD officers, Todd Hohbein and Chad Barrett, said diversity training taught them how to approach other ethnic groups.

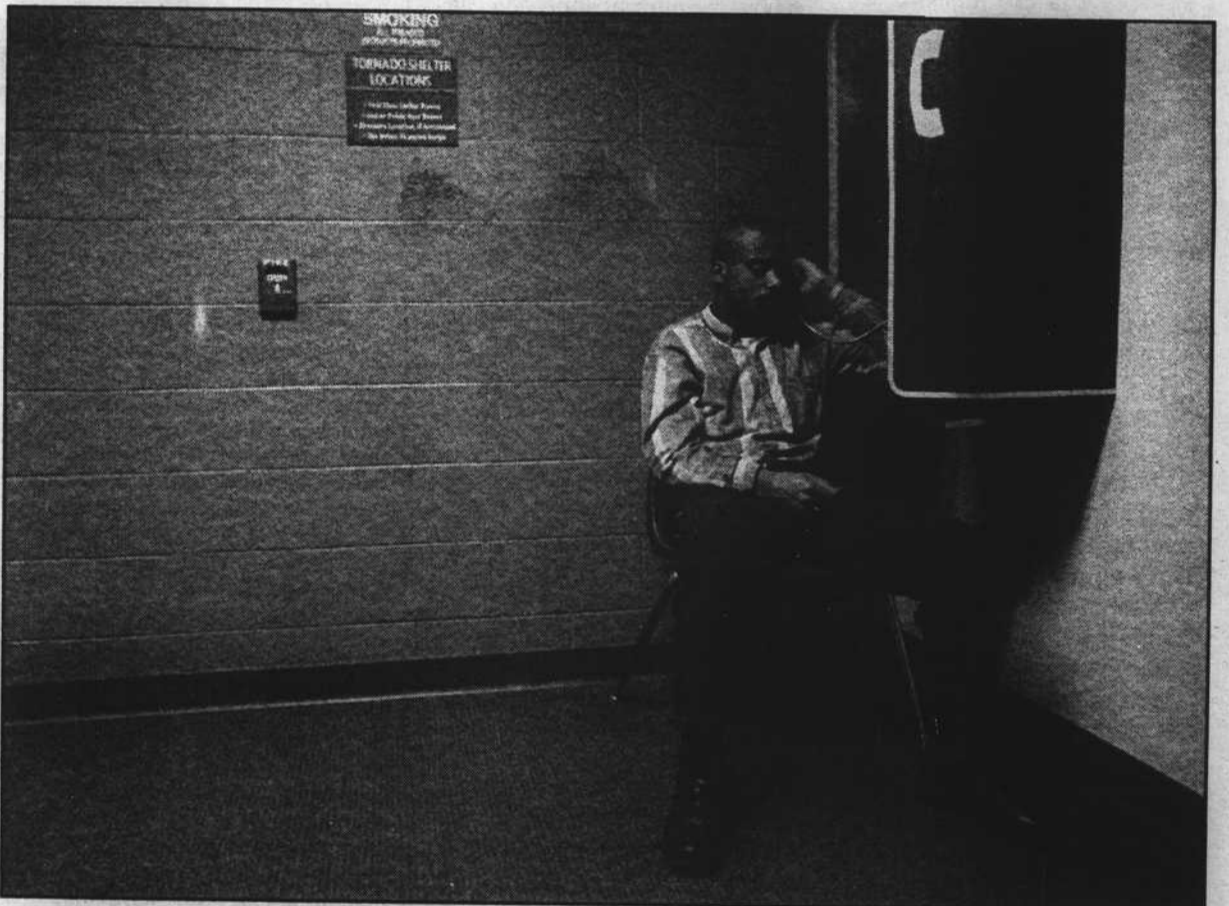
Though cultural training is important, Barrett said some people were using it to "jump to conclusions" about police officers.

"There's huge stereotypes," he said. "The number one thing you have to realize as a policeman is that people always wait for you to make a mistake."

"You make a mistake, you're on everybody's blacklist. You do something good, and you might hear about it. You might see it in the papers."

For nine years, Thomas Miller has served as the center's director. In the early years, he said, students came in with the perception that they would become the officers they saw on television.

Now, officers are younger, physi-



cally fit and have a stronger desire to help people, he said, and the training schedule has changed with them.

It's a great training center, Miller said, but it could be better.

After reviewing the training, in light of the Renteria incident, cultural awareness will be expanded from two to 13 hours. Miller said he would like to see the entire program extended to 14 weeks instead of 12.

At 6 a.m., the scent of fried eggs and sausage comes from the cafeteria. No doughnuts for these officers as they slowly file in for physical training. After stretching, they run two laps, then do push-ups.

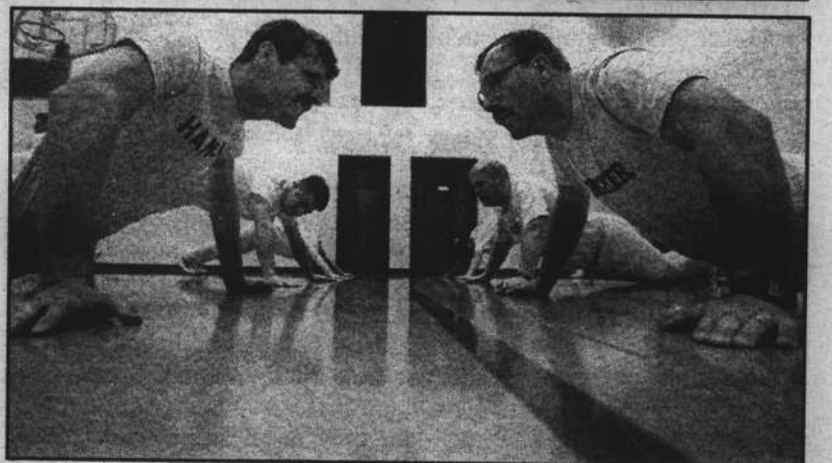
Instructor Kevin Westphal barks, "You're a cop. You can do anything, and you have to."

Launa Humiston is willing to do anything. Humiston has wanted to be a police officer since she was 14, and she's preparing for LPD.

Her parents weren't in favor of her decision at first.

"They did not think it was a wise choice for a female," she said. "They thought I was too small."

Humiston tried her hand at accounting, but when she turned 21, her real love prevailed.



Top photo: Traci Bosen, left, slumps in her chair during a four-hour class while Philip Brazelton yawns. Middle photo: Albert Fleming finds time between classes to call his girlfriend on Valentine's Day. For many students, the telephone is the only contact with friends and family. Bottom photo: Brad Hansen, left, and Russell Besmer do push-ups as part of their physical training. The students have mandatory physical training three days a week at 6 a.m.

Photos by Jay Calderon

Like most of the officers, Humiston will undergo additional training at her own agency. Graduation from the center clears the first step of her goal.

When that day comes, Humiston said she would feel a mix of happiness and relief — but no fear. "I'm going to make it."