

What's In It For Me?

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It's a question that people constantly ask themselves about a variety of different things. Another may be, "Why should I get involved with the Citizen's Police Academy or the Illinois Citizen's Police Academy Association?"

In this, the first of two articles on this subject, I will take a look and try to explain what the benefits of this training and association are. This issue will examine the perspective of the police officer in this regard. The next issue

will examine the question from the perspective of the citizen graduate of the Citizen's Police Academy program.

Police officers need to get involved with the Citizen's Police Academy program because you need help. As much as all of us feel that we are going to conquer crime and save the world all by ourselves, the truth of the matter is that we need as much help from citizens as we can get. We can't do this effectively by ourselves and in a vacuum. Police budgets are shrinking, and, as a result, police resources are stretched to the breaking point. Bringing in trustworthy trained citizens only makes sense to counter these problems.

You might ask, "What about all those super secret confidential things that we do?" The response to that concern is that's what background investigations are for. It's not going to be perfect, but nothing is. The truth is that there is not that

much in police work that is super secret.

The upside of having trained citizens to assist the police is great. A second set of eyes on a police problem can be very helpful in solving and preventing crime.

In these days, with terrorism and other complex crimes providing challenges to the police and society, an extra set of *trained* eyes can be a very important and effective asset to the police. Many cases that I have worked in my 30 years in law enforcement have been solved by citizen witnesses who have made observations or overheard a conversation and came forward and reported it. Can you imagine how much more common this would be if these eyes and ears received the same type of training that Citizen's Police Academy programs provide?

The reason to join the Illinois Citizen's Police Academy Association is to take this program one step further. As the Illinois CPAA grows and prospers, we will be able to provide training in advanced topics beyond the basic Citizen's Police Academy.* In addition, a major advantage of any association is networking with others who do the same thing that you do. The results of that can only be positive.

As we move further into the 21st century, law enforcement authorities will be facing challenges that we cannot begin to imagine now. Having a trained, vetted and dedicated group of citizens providing assistance to the police can only be a positive situation. That's what's in it for you. ❖

The role of the police has always been of interest to the average citizen. The television media has capitalized upon this curiosity with shows such as "Cops," "America's Most Wanted," and "CSI." Each week, real police action is broadcast into the living rooms of millions of Americans. Numerous police agencies have also benefitted from the curiosity that citizens have about the police. These agencies have formed Citizen Police Academy (CPA) programs that create an expansion of their community-based policing efforts. Here are a few of the benefits of a CPA program:

- Opens the lines of communication between the community and the police department.
- Citizens and police officers have an opportunity to work closely together.
- Citizens gain the ability to make informed decisions regarding controversial issues facing the community, and become aware of problems facing their police department.
- Citizen involvement with the police department is enhanced.
- Citizens gain a better understanding of how their police department works.
- Graduates interested in continuing the "partnership" that develops in a Citizens Police Academy continue their involvement by joining various law enforcement-related volunteer programs such as:

Citizen's Police Academy Alumni Association
Citizens on Patrol
Community Emergency Response Team
Neighborhood Watch
Volunteers in Police Service

**You can help the Illinois CPAA keep growing by photocopying and distributing the enclosed membership application to fellow law enforcement officers, alumni, and volunteers.*