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The Perris Police Explorers are Looking for New Recruits



Perris Explorer Post 522 Capt. Ericka Rogero inspects a line of Explorers during a recent training session at the Ben Clark Training Center.

The Perris Police Department is looking for a dozen teen-agers and young adults to join the ranks of its Explorers contingent.

Explorers learn the basics of police work by observing the pros in action. They assist at Perris-sponsored events like the annual Health Fair, at municipal parades, the Tree Lighting Ceremony and Shop with a Cop. They observe police officers working at DUI checkpoints. And every year a select handful to attend "Ex-Con"—the national Explorers' Convention where they pit their skills against other Explorers from around the country.

Explorers keep in shape by working out regularly at the Ben Clark Training Center. In addition to running, pushups and jumping jacks, the Explorers practice real-life law enforcement scenarios—like confronting an armed and barricaded suspect, dealing with a mentally disturbed person, hostage-rescuing and officer-down situations. Such realistic training challenges will be included during Ex-Con, which is coming up in June in Las Vegas.

Some of the 20 or so Perris Explorers Post 522 members are considering careers in law enforcement. But that's not the main mission of the Perris Post, said advisor and Perris Police Officer Ernie Dominguez.

"It's about developing self-confidence, camaraderie, communications skills and leadership skills," said Dominguez, who grew up in Perris. "Over time, the Explorers come to think of themselves as a family. It's great to get them involved in City events. The Explorers love it, and the City loves it. The City of Perris has been very supportive of our Explorer program by inviting them to take part in events and recognizing them for their involvement."

Post 522 cadets must:



Perris Police Explorers discuss possible alternatives to rescuing an injured victim during scenario training. Explorer Post 522 has about 20 cadets and wants to enroll another dozen or so.

- *Be 14 to 20 years of age
- *Maintain a 2.0-grade point average
- *Keep clean-grooming standards
- *Avoid discipline issues in school

Physical training

Every session at the Ben Clark Training Center starts with a uniform inspection carried out by experienced Explorers looking for sharp crease in uniform pants, an erect posture, polished boots and trousers neatly tucked inside footwear. It's about paying attention to detail, noticing the little things, correcting the smallest errors—skills that could keep a cop alive in a dire emergency.

Then the calisthenics begin. Explorers "hit the deck" while doing bear crawls and pushups, alternating those routines with jumping jacks and stretches. There's lap running as well. A constant refrain as they make their way through physical training: Enthusiastically voicing the Perris' contingent's motto: "Post five-two-two; always strong, always true!!!"

Erika Rogero, 18, and Jorge Gonzalez, 19, led a recent workout session.

Rogero, who attends Rancho Verde High School, said she enjoys the real-life training Explorers experience, just like the men and women who wear law-enforcement uniforms. Physical fitness plays a big part in her future as well. She hopes to become a military police officer in the Marines.



Running laps takes place every time Perris Post 522 Explorers congregate at the Ben Clark Training Center.

"You get real hands-on training, everything a cop would," Rogero said. "It's also great because real sheriff's deputies critique our efforts and results."

Asked to name three qualities she's taken from her time as an Explorer, Rogero said: "leadership, discipline, integrity."

Dream come true

Gonzalez, who attends Moreno Valley College, said he too is working to become a police officer. Such a job, he said, would fulfill "my dream since I was a kid." He's spent more than four years as a member of Post 522.

He considers his work as an Explorer captain as a sort-of teaching gig.

"It's nice to lead younger Explorers and teach them discipline and maturity," he said. "It makes me feel proud."



Perris Explorer Post 522 members posed for a photo at the Ben Clark Training Center. Advisor Ernie Dominguez, a Perris Police Officer, stands at far right in back row.

During a recent training session, the Explorers put themselves through several scenarios cops on the street encounter. Those included clearing a building, locating a barricaded and uncooperative suspect, investigating a shooting and rescuing a person wounded by gunfire. The Explorers developed their strategy and put it into action while Dominguez and fellow Explorer advisor Officer Joseph Murray looked on.

Making their way down darkened corridors in an abandoned building at the training center, the Explorers encountered the same hazards cops do—lack of lighting, limited time to resolve the crisis, confined spaces with little room for maneuver, unknown dangers lurking at every turn. Explorers took turns leading the scenarios—some which ended successfully, others that clearly showed their lack of savvy and experience.

The pros provided advice learned on the job: Remain calm, be thorough as you conduct your search, don't use excessive force, resist the urge to overreact which could result in someone innocent being injured. During one scenario, the Explorers tried to do too much—attempting to arrest a barricaded suspect when their mission called for them only to evacuate a wounded victim. A lesson learned not from a textbook but from encountering real-life stress and confusion, the kind of lesson the Explorers say stays with them.

Heritage High School senior Jacob Pantoja, 18, said belonging to Explorers Post 522 has improved his leadership skills and ability to function as part of a team. Membership in the program has made him a better person.

"We're doing what we like and we're working together," Pantoja said. "We're bonding as a team."

Perris residents interested in joining the Explorers can pick up an application at Police Headquarters at 137 North Perris Boulevard or by calling 951-210-1000.

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