

# Police cadet turning his dream of being a cop into reality

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By William Harms

Ed Wolf joins seven other young men doing stretching exercises and jumping jacks in the basement of the Oak Lawn police station.

They are preparing for the topic of that week's meeting of the Oak Lawn Police Cadets: self-defense.

"You can expect resistance any time you take action as a police officer," Officer Robert Brewer says. "There are times when you'll have to stop someone who displays a weapon and times when you have to show self-control."

Brewer then demonstrates ways to use their feet to block an assault and other techniques of protecting themselves.

Such physical action is one of the attractions the cadet program has for Wolf. Since he was a youngster, Wolf has been interested in becoming a police officer because of the stories he heard from two uncles in the Chicago Police Department.

"But I think I also like police work because police officers get an opportunity to work with people, to do good and to get people on the right track," he says. "I think they can have a real impact on helping youngsters avoid getting involved in gangs, and I think that's a great thing and something I'd like to do."

He also is impressed with the



Police cadet Ed Wolf tallies his score on the pistol range. Wolf, also training to be a firefighter, says he enjoys police work the most.

work of officers who go into schools to teach the dangers of drug abuse.

"I have a sister who learned about drug abuse in school from a police officer," he says. "He knew all of the students' names, and he remembered my sister when he'd see her on the street. That meant a lot to her that he remembered her name, that he was friendly, and I like that aspect of police work."

Wolf, 19, joined the cadet program in 1989.

In addition to self-defense

training, the cadets learn to direct traffic, identify evidence and fire weapons. They also ride with police officers on their beats.

Wolf has a vivid memory of a ride-along incident. While he was in the car, a radio call came in of a burglary in progress at an Oak Lawn business.

"I think what struck me most was the rush [of adrenalin] that I got when we took off with the sirens blaring. You just don't know what is waiting for you when you get to the scene," he recalls.

After he and the officer arrived at the scene, Wolf waited in the car while the officer checked out the business.

"It turned out to be a false alarm," says Wolf, who is a freshman at Moraine Valley Community College in Palos Hills. Although there were no arrests, the evening convinced Wolf that he wanted to pursue police work.

Other cadets are impressed by Wolf's dedication and interest in police work.

"He brings up new ideas for us to try," says John Krakowski, 17, a senior at Oak Lawn Community High School. "He suggested that we begin using 9 mm pistols [for target practice], for instance, which are new to police work." Use of this caliber pistol is becoming a trend in police departments.

"Last year when we needed a treasurer, because one of the cadets left, he agreed to take over that job, even though he was also secretary. He sets a good example for us."

"Ed is very motivated, and I think that helps the rest of us to be motivated as well," says Scott Frieled, 20, who also is a freshman at Moraine Valley.

For Brewer, one of the officers who teaches the cadet program, his interest in the cadets comes naturally. He was a cadet at the department from 1975 to 1977 and has been a member of the

department for eight years.

"I'm very thankful for the training I got in the cadets," he says.

When Brewer became a cadet, the program was an Explorer post, associated with the Boy Scouts of America.

About five years ago, it relinquished its affiliation with the Boy Scouts and became the Oak Lawn Police Cadets. "We switched primarily because of insurance," says Sgt. James Spalina, the cadets' adviser. "When the group was organized, it was easier to get insurance through the Scouts. But about five years ago, it became possible to get our insurance through the Police Department, so we did."

The Oak Lawn unit has about a dozen members and meets every two weeks at the police station, at 9431 S. Cook Ave. Membership is open to men and women between the ages of 15 and 21.

Wolf says he has gained a new respect for the work of police officers as a result of the program.

"I never realized that so much mathematics was used in evidence gathering, for instance. They have to use trigonometry for that, for instance, when they figure the trajectory of a bullet," he says.

During the summer, Wolf and the other cadets assist police at the village's annual celebration,

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Oak Lawn Fest. The cadets oversee parking and direct traffic.

"We also walked around, to check on the crowd," Wolf says.

The cadets spotted some teenagers who were wearing their baseball caps in a way that suggested gang affiliation. They asked the teenagers to wear their caps in a conventional manner, Wolf says.

"It made me feel good when they straightened them around" with no argument, he says. "That showed that they respect-

ed my authority."

Spalina praises Wolf for his contributions to the organization.

"He's a very dependable person. I think the thing that people respect him most for is his maturity. You can depend on him to do his work, and the other cadets follow his example," Spalina says.

Wolf graduated from Oak Lawn Community High School in January 1992, where he was active in wrestling and football. He lives with his parents and his 13-year-old sister and 4-year-old

brother.

He also works for the Hometown Fire Department, where he has been a candidate for paid firefighter since September. He is in a training program that he expects to complete this month.

"I enjoy firefighter work as well, and am planning to take training as an emergency medical technician," he says.

But Wolf really prefers police work to firefighting, he says. "What I like about police work is the personal contact police have with the public—and also the excitement of the job."