Crime-solving experience with FBI; 30 Wisconsin students participate in academy

It was a crime scene on the Marquette University campus, and 16-year-old Andrew Lee was in charge of making sure evidence collection followed a proper chain of command.

Under the direction of Special Agent Eric Fraser, an Evidence Response Team leader and onsite coordinator, five teams of six students searched, collected and labeled the scene of an abduction at Marquette University's Humphrey Hall.

In all, 30 young people from all over the state embarked this week on their crime-solving journey as part of the FBI's Future Law Enforcement Youth Academy - a program introducing young people to the world of law enforcement, complete with an "integrated case scenario" that involves hands-on training to solve a crime.

The crime wasn't real, but everything else was.

From the handwriting analysis class on Monday to the Tyvex suits, booties and gloves students donned before going through the dormitory and collecting evidence, the overall experience is a perfect opportunity for someone like Lee, who said he is seriously thinking about becoming a special agent and applying to the FBI's internship once he is eligible.

'Bigger and better'

FLEYA, which originated from New Haven, Connecticut, has three goals: improving the perception of law enforcement, providing a hands-on experience and illustrating the importance of agency cooperation.

The Milwaukee FBI division's previous special-agent-in-charge, Justin Tolomeo, brought FLEYA to the city last year in a partnership with Marquette University. Once the program came to Milwaukee, Marquette Police Lt. Jill Weisensel wanted it to be "bigger and better."

That meant creating the integrated case scenario, where students solve a crime from beginning to end.

On Monday, the students went through a presentation on handwriting analysis, received a 911 call and learned the case was an abduction from witnesses.

On Tuesday, students used a black light to see bodily fluids and a Hemastix to test potential blood evidence.

From Wednesday to Friday, Lee and the other students will attend briefings, go through a use-of-force simulator, tour the Milwaukee Police Department's Academy on Teutonia Avenue and process evidence from the car.

Students go through a rigorous application process, which includes a GPA requirement, essay submission and panel interview with Marquette University and FBI personnel; at the end of the process, 15 male and 15 female students are chosen to participate.

Lee, who will be a junior at Sheboygan High School next year, said he hopes attending FLEYA will add to his existing law enforcement experience from the Sheboygan Police Explorers.

"It was interesting just talking to FBI agents and knowing what they did to become who they are," he said.
In the meantime, he said he will prepare for a future career in law enforcement by improving his listening and memory skills and picking up a foreign language.

Immersive experience

Through presentations and hands-on experiences, students will be exposed to the Department of Natural Resources, ATF, police and sheriff's deputies, State Patrol and prosecutors.

"We like to expose them to all different types of law enforcement because the profession of policing is much bigger than enforcing law," Weisensel said.

Katelyn Budzisz is a 17-year-old senior from South Milwaukee who collected evidence with the White Team. She said she plans on becoming a pilot in the military and attended the program because she's interested in exploring post-military career options.

"I grew up serving people because that's what makes me happy," she said.

Budzisz, a Civil Air Patrol and South Milwaukee Leo Club volunteer, was surprised at the variety of occupations and agencies under the umbrella of law enforcement.

"There are so many different aspects of law enforcement," she said. "I used to think it was just police and FBI, but now it's like there's a job for every person."

There's also all different types of people who have jobs in law enforcement, something 37-year FBI veteran Tracey Ballinger said was important to show students.

"Those kids saw that those people on the panel, they're human," she said. "They make mistakes, they learn from those mistakes."

Paul Bresson, a 27-year veteran of the Community Relations Unit, agreed.

It's important for the students to hear how the FBI agents in their current positions have a lot in common with the young students, he said, adding that in some cases, the students will be starting from a better position than some of the agents at their age.

Ballinger and Bresson both came from the FBI headquarters in Washington, D.C., because they were impressed with the program and hope to use it as a template for other field offices across the country.

On Friday, the students will give a presentation about their theory of the crime and graduate at a ceremony where Milwaukee County Sheriff Earnell Lucas will speak.

Applications for next year's Future Law Enforcement Youth Academy will be open in March 2020.

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