



TRAINING THE PERSON, NOT JUST THE OFFICER:

BLUE COURAGE

TRI-C COURSE FOCUSES ON PHYSICAL, MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH OF POLICE

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Police officers have one of the most stressful occupations in the country. Tasked with protecting citizens and enforcing laws, they operate in an environment in which confrontations are the norm.

Officers serve as the field referees in domestic disputes, the sleuths who track down thieves and the wranglers who snare drunk drivers on roadways. They are the defenders who risk their own safety by stepping between law-abiding citizens and those who would do them harm.

Over time, the daily exposure to high stress can chip away at job performance. Officers can experience burnout, and develop a cynical, calloused attitude toward the communities they serve. That, in turn, plays a role in eroding the relationship between police and the population at large.

Blue Courage is a national police training program that acknowledges the unique challenges that come with police work. It requires participants to examine the relationship between police and the community and provides insight into the physical, mental and emotional toll of police work, ultimately helping officers construct a healthier work-life balance.

Cuyahoga Community College's Public Safety Center of Excellence added Blue Courage to its police academy's required curriculum in 2016. This summer, the course will become mandatory for all police academies in Ohio.

Chief Clayton Harris, dean of public safety for Tri-C, said the College took a leadership role in the advancement of police training by adopting Blue Courage before it became mandatory.

"Tri-C has always valued innovation, creativity and leading change," Harris said. "Early on, we recognized how important Blue Courage would be. We always try to seek out better ways to train law enforcement professionals so they can perform at the highest level."

Commander Elijah Baisden, a certified Blue Courage instructor, teaches the course to Tri-C police cadets as well as to veteran officers from police departments throughout the region.

The program has been widely adopted by police department and training academies around the nation because it addresses the person behind the badge. The central concept of Blue Courage is that a healthy, well-rounded person becomes a healthy, well-rounded officer.

"THE FIRST TIME I READ THE MATERIAL, I REALIZED THAT BLUE COURAGE HAD HIT UPON SOMETHING SPECIAL AND WORTHWHILE. IT WAS SOMETHING POLICE AND COMMUNITIES NEEDED AND COULD BENEFIT FROM."





One of the most important messages in the program is the need for work-life balance. Police officers tend to grade poorly in terms of work-life balance, and that can have a number of negative effects on the job. It's OK to have fun. It's OK to do the things you enjoy. Even if it's just for a short time, it's good to get away from the stress of the job for a while.

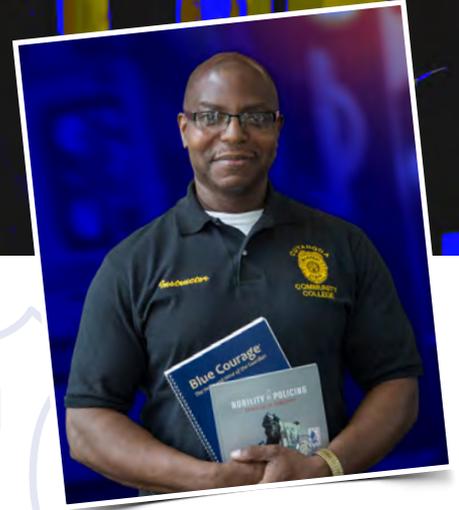
"The key to Blue Courage is that it addresses four main areas of personal health — physical, mental, emotional and spiritual," Baisden said. "The idea is that if you pay attention to those four areas, you'll be a healthier individual overall and better able to respond to the needs of the community you serve."

To achieve greater health in those areas, Blue Courage first teaches its participants to look inward at the state of their own lives — not just when they're in uniform, but away from duty as well.

Blue Courage also stresses the importance of looking outward. Controversial and highly publicized incidents involving the use of weapons and physical force by police have contributed to deteriorating relationships between police and the communities they serve. This can add to the stress police encounter each day.

As a result, police officers can easily become callous and cynical toward the public. It can cause a police department's culture to become one of exclusion, which can create barriers between police and the community.

Olmsted Township Police Chief Matthew Vanyo took the Blue Courage course at Tri-C in 2016 along with other members of his department. He said the program emphasized the importance of police operating as both law enforcers and members of the community.



COMMANDER ELIJAH BAIDEN
CERTIFIED BLUE COURAGE INSTRUCTOR

"We aren't just a badge or a belt," Vanyo said. "We are members of the communities we serve. We have to uphold the law, but do so with compassion, do so in a way that garners trust and respect. Without that, not only does the relationship with the community deteriorate, the department itself fractures."

Law enforcement will always be one of the most difficult professions a person can enter. Those who succeed in it must have a passion for the work that is strong enough to outlast the difficulties and dangers of the job.

"BLUE COURAGE DOESN'T CHANGE THE NATURE OF THE PROFESSION, BUT IT CAN BETTER PREPARE OFFICERS FOR THE WORK AHEAD."

"This is a noble, honorable profession," Vanyo said. "It is a calling, and I truly believe that. Blue Courage makes you remember why you entered the profession. We entered it to serve, and focusing on that purpose is what drives you. It's what makes you a better officer, a better community member and gives you the resiliency to overcome the challenges of the job."