

Westchester Youth Police Academy Visits Courthouse in Recognition of “Law Day”

You're a high school senior, finished your course work, and accepted to college. But there's still a month left of school, so you take advantage of school sponsored internships. And you visit the Westchester County Courthouse.

Thirty high school seniors from the Westchester Youth Police Academy, representing 11 different high schools, got a taste of the criminal justice system as they toured the courthouse, for a “post” Law Day event. The students, most of whom want to go on to law-related careers, also got a unique experience when they were invited to sit in at a suppression hearing.

The three hour visit began with an introduction by Court Officer Karen Buddenhagen in the lobby of the Courthouse. Next the students and their leaders,

Detective Gabrielsen of the Croton Police Department, Detective Vacca of the Ardsley PD and Officer Kamke of the Dobbs Ferry PD took seats in an empty courtroom and heard what it's like to be a prosecutor from assistant district attorney John O'Rourke. They also learned the difference between what happens in a “real” trial as opposed to one on television from Al Naclario, principal law clerk to Judge Cacace.

But when Judge Zambelli invited them to her courtroom to listen to an on-going hearing to determine whether evidence in a trial should be suppressed, the students saw justice in action.

“To sit in a courtroom for an actual proceeding was amazing; a great experience for the students,” said Det. Gabrielsen who heads up the program along with Det. Kolarik of the North Castle Police. “Most of them want to go into law enforcement, and this was a terrific way for them to see first-hand how the system works. They also got a good idea of the kinds of careers in the criminal justice system.



30 High School seniors, from 11 different Westchester County High School



ADA John O'Rourke address the students



Principal Law Clerk Al Naclario addresses the students



Students listen attentively in Judge Cacace's courtroom

Gabrielsen said that the month long internship program is modeled after a regular police academy. The kids go through physical training each morning to build up stamina. In the classroom, they learn about search and seizure, Miranda rights, vehicle and traffic law, fingerprinting, gangs, ballistics, crime scene investigation and more. Then, there are the field trips, one of which took them to the Courthouse. At the end of the program, the students get to “ride along” with actual police officers and, of course, there is a graduation ceremony.

The Court was pleased to host the students and to add courtroom procedure to their knowledge. Thanks go to James Garfein, and Lisa Dorman for arranging the tour.