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Wichita nonprofit trains police in martial arts

By Bill Wilson
The Wichita Eagle

The dangers on the street that police officers face are on the rise.

Gone are the days when a baton and a gun were enough for an officer to handle any disturbance. Now, trained martial-arts fighters skilled at hand-to-hand combat can threaten an officer's safety.

That's what brought a dozen Kansas law enforcement officers together Saturday morning at Blue Line Survival Training in south Wichita, a nonprofit group dedicated to providing survival training to police.

"There's always the possibility that we have to take care of a situation with physical violence," said Chad Gay, a master patrolman with 18 years on the Newton Police Department. "There are more trained fighters out there than ever, and we're also seeing a lot of people come out of the military with a lot more advanced training than even I did when I was in the Marine Corps in the 1980s. We're seeing a lot of those guys with combat and fight experience, and not all of them are good guys.

"This is about trying to stay ahead of the bad guys."

Blue Line offers a variety of free tactical training to officers. The program's costs are picked up, according to its website www.bluelinesurvival.org, by sponsors like the United States Peace Officers Association, the United States Deputy Sheriff's Association and the Reserve Police Officers Association.

Owned by president Mike Willis, a former Newton police officer, and vice president David Hinnners, a current Wichita police officer, the group's credits include training in Kentucky, South Carolina and Florida to meet the evolution of violence that confronts law enforcement.

"Mike and I started training together 20 years ago and he started training for the United States Deputy Sheriff's Association about 13 years ago and I started about eight," Hinnners said. "The deputy sheriff's association changed hands a few years ago, and Mike and I decided that we'd like to work for ourselves so we started this nonprofit organization."

On Saturday, the officers focused on "instinctive hand-to-hand combat," training with Willis, Hinnners and other trainers.

"Most agencies and most training academies give the basics of self-defense, but when it comes down to a real good street fight, that's something a lot of agencies don't teach," Hinnners said. "So Mike and I wanted to get out there and make sure we show these people where you can take it, get them trained more for a fight if it happens."

The dangers police officers face are evolving rapidly and growing, Hinnners said.

"Officers have handguns. They're trained with handguns. And hopefully in their careers, they never have to use their handguns," he said. "We go hands on every day to get these people prepared and training for it, kind of the same kind of training."

Officers from as far away as Liberal attended Saturday's session.

"The academy teaches us a lot, but I feel like it's good to touch on it a little more," said Liberal patrol Officer Brett Lawrence. "We try to use a gun as little as possible, and nowadays a lot of people use MMA (mixed martial arts) and train nonstop, so we've got to be able to match them blow-for-blow."

Reach Bill Wilson at 316-268-6290 or bwilson@wichitaeagle.com.

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