



A Chance to Look Inside the FBI

By Charles Smith & Cathleen Henniges

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) offers a Citizens Academy program that annually allows a select group of individuals the opportunity to obtain a better understanding of the FBI's inner workings. Have you ever wondered what practices and procedures the FBI follows in its operations and investigations? Or have you ever pondered what the FBI's capabilities and resources entail? The FBI's Citizens Academy program provides a firsthand look at the FBI from an organization and operational standpoint.

At the heart of the FBI's community outreach is the idea that "[t]he better we know our communities, the better we can protect them." The Citizens Academy program broadens the FBI's community outreach efforts by not only allowing the FBI to gain a better understanding of the communities it serves, but also by allowing the community to gain a better understanding of the FBI. Each of the FBI's 56 field offices, plus the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia, offers the Citizens Academy program. The FBI's Phoenix Citizens Academy, which offers classes at both its Phoenix and Tucson locations, was started in 1993 to strengthen the Phoenix field office's relationship with the community. The FBI's Phoenix Division covers 15 counties, with Headquarters in Phoenix and seven resident agencies located throughout the area.

The Phoenix Division's Citizens Academy program is offered once a year and meets nine times in an eight week period. Each class lasts three hours and is taught by a combination of the Special Agent in Charge (SAC), Assistant Special Agents in Charge (ASACs), Supervisory Special Agents (SSAs), Special Agents and also a variety of specialized professionals such as intelligence and financial analysts. The classes cover a broad range of materials which include procedures to collect and preserve evidence, information about the FBI's jurisdiction, insight into the operation of a field office, firearms demonstration, and specialized discussions on policies and issues affecting that community. If the program content wasn't interesting enough, graduates of the Citizens Academy have a once in a lifetime opportunity to tour the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia and the FBI Headquarters in Washington, D.C..

There is a rigorous application process to participate in the Citizens Academy program. Applicants must be business, community, civic, or religious leaders who are at least 21 years old, and can be nominated by an FBI employee, Citizens Academy graduate, or any individual wishing to self-nominate. Additional requirements for applicants include that an applicant cannot have any prior felony or serious misdemeanor convictions, must live and work in the area covered by the field office sponsoring the Citizens Academy, and must undergo a background check. Applications are accepted in the Fall, and the Citizens Academy classes are held each Spring. For more information about the application process, please contact the Phoenix Division's Community Outreach Specialist, Jane Bjornstad at Jane.Bjornstad@ic.fbi.gov.

Once someone graduates from the Citizens Academy, which is run directly by the FBI, that person has the opportunity to join the Citizens Academy Alumni Association connected with their field office. The Alumni Associations are private nonprofit organizations and are completely separate organizations from the FBI. The FBI Phoenix Citizens Academy Alumni Association (FBIPCAAAA) aims to make our communities safer through community service projects, educational events about the mission, resources, and limitations of

the FBI, and other activities in consultation with the Special Agent in Charge of the Phoenix Division. One annual educational event provides an inside look at an FBI investigation. Two of these past educational events focused on Jared Loughner and Ted Kaczynski (the Unabomber). The FBIPCAAAA also promotes the FBI's Community Outreach programs, including the CREST Program (a shorter, more specialized version of the Citizens Academy), FBI Teen Academy, assisting refugee resettlement communities, promoting internet safety, along with various other programs.



The FBI Citizens Academy program has a large impact in making our communities a safer place by not only allowing the FBI to better understand and protect the communities, but also by empowering graduates of the program with the knowledge and connections necessary to enact positive change. You may learn more about the FBIPCAAAA by visiting their website at <http://phxfbica.org/>.