

Expo shines light on good works in neighborhoods

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

It's no secret that neighborhood groups, and non-profit organizations, play an important role in shaping the community we live in, but often they don't receive the praise they deserve.

To show their appreciation for organizations and individuals who volunteer their time to helping others, last Saturday, Dec. 3, the city sponsored the Project WE CARE! Neighborhood Expo. Hosted annually by the Community and Business Development Department, this year the event featured free lunch and entertainment. More than two dozen vendors were also on hand to provide information on some of the services the city has to offer.

Initiated by Mayor Pro Tempore Vivian H. Burke, Project WE CARE! started in 2009 after a national call for community service by

President Barack Obama. Kathryn Mobley, city Marketing and Communications video producer and emcee for the expo, said although she had already spent most of her life doing community serv-



Mack

ice, at the time Burke started the project she was inspired to do more.

"She recognized the importance of honoring people who demonstrate civic pride by giving of themselves to other people," Mobley said.

"She reminded us that this is the right thing to do. It's what makes us able to

call where we live home and to feel proud about it."

As she stood before the hundreds of volunteers inside the Fairgrounds Education Building, Burke said, "From the bottom of my heart I thank you for caring about this city."

She mentioned the one thing she regrets about Project WE CARE! is that she was unable to get Washington to recognize the wonderful things that are going on here in Winston-Salem.

"We're probably one of the most forward cities in the country when it comes to volunteerism," she said. "It appears President Obama will leave office without knowing the great



Photo by Tevin Stinson

Locals visit some of the many vendors offered at the Project WE CARE! Neighborhood Expo on Saturday, Dec. 3.

work we are doing, but we will continue to work to make sure Washington recognizes all the great work you do."

After lunch, each community organization in attendance received a certificate of recognition and a button marking the occasion. Chris Mack and Twanda Montgomery, community assistance liaisons and event coordinators, also made a special

presentation honoring Burke for her hard work to make the city a better place for everyone.

Mack said, "We are proud to take this opportunity to recognize an outstanding visionary leader in Winston-Salem by the title of Dr. Vivian H. Burke."

"Our city has always been outstanding in coming together, and Dr. Burke has played a major part in

that." When discussing the future of the event, Mack seemed confident that the expo will continue to grow as more associations and organizations become available in the community.

"This program started out small with big vision and each and every year this program tends to break the record for attendance," Mack said.

Forsyth Tech has smallest police training class ever to graduate

BY TODD LUCK
THE CHRONICLE

With the number of police cadets dwindling, the smallest class of the Basic Law Enforcement Training (BLET) course at Forsyth Technical Community College graduated on Friday, Dec. 2.

Though there were only seven in the class, they still had the full, thorough training of the 17-week course that featured 48 instructors and 36 written tests. Cadets were trained in firearms use, driving, crowd control and other scenarios officers find themselves in.

BLETs across the state have seen falling numbers in recent years with 2016 being the worst. This year, 32 percent of classes were canceled because they didn't have enough students and only 1,067 cadets completed the training statewide, compared to 2,028 last year.

Instructors believe that highly publicized officer-involved shootings caused the general decline. The July mass shooting of police in Dallas, Texas, that killed five officers resulted in this year's number plummeting. The low numbers in the local class also meant that minorities and women that are normally among the cadets weren't present.

The class should have had about 20 students, but most dropped out after the shooting. Sgt. Joshua Church of the N.C. Highway Patrol told the class that while law enforcement is still "the most honorable profession out there," community faith in law enforcement has never been lower. He blamed video footage of officer-involved shootings going on social media where citizens - who know little about law enforcement - jump to the wrong conclusions.

"Many are out there thinking you should wait to draw your weapon and fire until you're fired upon, or they think that in any case where you shoot an individual that's unarmed it's unjustified, but you've been trained completely differently," said Church. "That just is not the truth any way you look at it."

Church told the class that "action always beats reaction" for officers. He

said there were "countless documented situations" where unarmed suspects killed officers and told the cadets to use their training to make "good, sound decisions" to come home safe.

He also said law enforcement is the only profession where you have to be willing to die for complete strangers. He said misconduct is relatively rare, and hoped the class would uphold that tradition. He told them to build bonds with those that they protect.

"Our positive image, the truth of what law enforcement in America really is, is up to you now," said Church.

Class president Cody Conrad dreamed of serving in both the military and police. After serving more than three years in the Army, he now looks forward to joining the "thin blue line."

"It's been the longest, quickest 16-17 weeks ever," he told his classmates.

Conrad, who plans to join the Highway Patrol, said he doesn't begrudge those who dropped out of the class, since law enforcement is a calling that isn't for everyone.

Graduate Frank Sanchez is a former Winston-Salem Police Department officer who, after some moves and job changes, needed to take the BLET again to become an officer in Kernersville. He said when he first took the BLET more than a decade ago, there were 30 cadets in his class.

He said he understood how people might be scared to enter the profession. He said being an officer is something you have to have in your heart.

"It's something you either really want to do, or you don't, there's no middle ground," said Sanchez. "You don't do this job halfway."

Those that completed BLET are ready to become sworn officers, though most agencies include an additional period of field training.

The other graduates of the class are Jordan Bullins, Cody Hampton, John Jackson, Ryan James and Samuel Paff.

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