

# The Times-Picayune



NEW ORLEANS

## Program aims to stop police misconduct



Officers role-play during a training program in May at the NOPD Training Academy on Lakeshore Drive. The program aims to prevent police misconduct by encouraging officers to intervene when they see tensions escalate. *David Grunfeld / dgrunfeld@nola.com*

NOPD officers are encouraged to intervene

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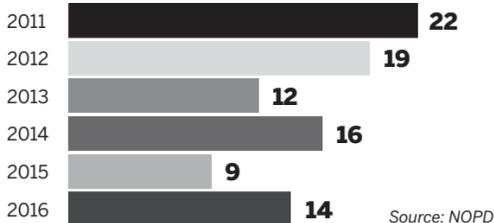
The suspect's face pressed against the classroom's carpeted floor, his wrists pulled toward presumed handcuffs.

"Here's your chance," a New Orleans police officer yelled to his partner, goading him to take a boot to the suspect trapped under his knee.

"It's not worth it!" his partner repeatedly shouted back. His head swiveled to each of the other cops present, ensuring none of them took advantage of the officer's suggestion.

And scene.  
SEE EPIC, A3

### NOPD officers terminated or resigned under investigation



WASHINGTON

## Sessions denies Russia contacts

In testimony, AG won't disclose talks with Trump

Charlie Savage, Emmarie Huetteman and Rebecca R. Ruiz  
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Attorney General Jeff Sessions engaged in highly contentious testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee on Tuesday, with Democrats pressing him on his conversations with President Donald Trump related to the investigation of Russian meddling in the 2016 election.

He called any suggestion that he colluded with Russians during the election an "appalling" lie. "Please, colleagues, hear me on this," he said.

Sessions said he would not discuss his direct conversations with Trump, saying, that "consistent with longstanding Department of Justice practice, I cannot and will not violate my duty to protect confidential communications with the president."

Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., chairman of the committee, said Sessions' testimony was his opportunity to "separate fact from fiction."

Burr's Democratic counterpart, Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia, quickly challenged Sessions' previous denial of contact with the Russians. "The fact is that you did indeed have interactions with Russian government officials during the course of the campaign," Warner said.

In his opening statement, Sessions said any suggestion that he participated in or was aware of any collusion between the Trump campaign and the Russian government to undermine the democratic process "is an appalling and detestable lie."

SEE SESSIONS, A11



WHERE NOLA EATS

### Pound for pound champion

The winner of our Win Your Weight in Shrimp Contest shares his recipe,  
FOOD & LIVING

NEW ORLEANS

## Landrieu hails port deal to extend riverfront park

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Mayor Mitch Landrieu said this week that a property exchange with the Port of New Orleans gives the city the final piece to create "the largest contiguous riverfront footprint in the United States of America," connecting Crescent Park to the upriver side of the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center.

"There will be no other city in America that's got that level of opportunity on the river," Landrieu said.

Landrieu spoke at a meeting of the Public Belt Railroad Commission, which approved a framework for a deal between the Public Belt, the city and the port. Under the proposal, the port gives the city the Gov. Nicholls Street and Esplanade Avenue wharves, which are being used by a shipping company; in exchange, the Public Belt's railroad assets

SEE RIVER, A4

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## EPIC

FROM A1

The intense exchange unfolded as part of a May 17 training session inside the New Orleans Police Department's Training Academy on Lakeshore Drive, where about a dozen visitors from other law enforcement agencies gathered to watch the city's Police Department continue with what has been touted as an innovative approach to preventing police misconduct.

It's called EPIC, an acronym for Ethical Policing Is Courageous, and it's the first peer intervention program within law enforcement aimed at preventing misconduct, said Mary Howell, a New Orleans civil rights attorney who has for decades represented clients in misconduct suits against the NOPD. "There are seeds being planted here," Howell told a federal judge May 18 during a hearing to discuss the program. "We're talking about a transformation."

About 60 percent of the force, 710 officers, had received EPIC training through the middle of May, said NOPD spokesman Beau Tidwell.

Interventions can be as dramatic as preventing a fellow officer from striking someone in handcuffs. But instructors said some strategies are more subtle: asking a fellow officer who seems to be in an irritable mood whether everything is all right at home, or suggesting that the officer grab a cup of coffee before dealing with a civilian. In one example scenario, an officer suggests a colleague give the social worker in the NOPD's officer assistance program a call after seeing him take his frustration out on his computer keyboard.

Jonathan Aronie, the lead monitor overseeing the NOPD's federal consent decree, said that if it is embraced, the program has the potential to help topple "the blue wall of silence" — a code of loyalty among police officers known to keep officers from stopping or reporting their co-workers' misconduct.

One of the hurdles, Aronie said, will be to convince rank-and-file officers that EPIC is "not a rat on your fellow officer program," but rather a tool to prevent officers "from getting into a situation where you have to decide whether to report anyone or not."

The training comes at a time when police misconduct and allegations of police brutality are at the forefront of a national conversation about the way police interact with the communities they serve. The nuanced conversation, thrust forward by footage from an increasing number of body-worn cameras and cellphone bystander video, touches on topics of social media, public safety and race.

In New Orleans, the training comes about five years into a federal consent decree — a mandate from the federal Department of Justice outlining sweeping reforms the department must adopt to correct a history of civil rights abuses. A federal probe into the NOPD's culture of misconduct and cover-ups — which culminated with the 2005 fatal shootings of unarmed men Henry Glover, James Brissette and Ronald Madison — set the consent decree in motion. More than 15 NOPD officers who held an array of ranks were under federal indictment in the Katrina-era Danziger Bridge and Glover cases. Most of them were convicted.

A federal monitoring team, which guides the NOPD in its implementation of its reforms and provides constant oversight, said the department's progress, particularly regarding use-of-force incidents, gave it "greater confidence in the integrity" of the NOPD.



**U.S. District Judge Susie Morgan talks with Lt. Terry St. Germain, left, and Sgt. Shawn Jenkins, who graduated from the EPIC peer intervention program. About 60 percent of NOPD officers have received the training.** Chris Granger / cgranger@nola.com

To develop EPIC, the NOPD consulted with consent decree monitors and with Howell, whose former clients include the Madison's family. Howell also brought on social scientist Ervis Staub to put together the curriculum.

Staub, a Jewish native of Budapest who escaped Nazi-occupied Hungary as a teenager, has spent his career studying "the role of passive bystanders in allowing the unfolding of violence," as well as the role of active bystanders in helping people, according to his website. An emeritus professor of psychology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Staub said the courage of individuals who helped his family survive in the 1940s sparked his interest in the topic.

Staub first taught bystander concepts to law enforcement in the 1990s when the state of California hired him to develop a use-of-force training program after the beating of Rodney King by members of the Los Angeles Police Department. Seventeen LAPD officers were accused of standing by and doing nothing while a handful of their colleagues hit King with their batons more than 50 times.

What makes the NOPD's program stand out from the training in California, Staub said in a phone interview, is EPIC's focus on how intervening benefits police officers and the overall profession — not just civilians and community-police relations.

"Part of the culture of police just about everywhere is that no matter what or when your fellow officer does something, you support that action by your fellow officer," Staub said.

The EPIC program, Staub said, seeks to "reshape this culture, so that officers see intervention by a fellow officer as an example of loyalty, rather than disloyalty ... as an example of support for the officer, rather than any kind of disrespect or disloyalty."

### 'WE'RE NOT ROBOTS'

With the flurry of new policies and training brought on by the consent decree, Aronie said, he worried the department would overlook EPIC.

EPIC is being pitched as an "officer survival program," which Aronie said he hoped would ward off "program fatigue." Stopping a clearly heated officer from using unnecessary force on a civilian could save the civilian's life and the officer's life.

But, as instructors pointed out, police officers receive countless hours of training to prevent line-of-duty deaths. Through EPIC, they said, officers can learn how to save themselves — and their colleagues — from the kinds of incidents that lead to embarrassing headlines and the potential loss of a job.

Instructors Jacob Lundy and Charlie Hoffacker, both veteran NOPD officers, presented the class with national statistics from 2008 on the number of officers who died in the line of

duty or who took their own lives. Approximately 140 officers died in each category, according to data the instructors cited, which was compiled by NOPD consultant Michael Quinn, author of the 2005 book "Walking with the Devil: The Police Code."

In that same time period, approximately 1,500 police officers across the country either lost their jobs or left under investigation, the instructors said.

"I don't want my home to be taken away because I did something wrong," Hoffacker told the class of trainees, noting the public loss of officers' jobs sometimes breaks up families and renders them unemployable.

As Lundy noted, a federal judge ruled in September that three police officers in Allentown, Pennsylvania, could be held civilly lia-

ble for failing to stop a 2011 police beating, even though those officers did not participate in the beating. The officers now face trial in the incident. "It's not a hypothetical," Hoffacker said to punctuate Lundy's point. "This happens. And it will happen again."

Lundy called the impulse to hide a fellow officer's misconduct "misguided loyalty." He asked the class members, which included more than a dozen visitors from agencies as far away as San Francisco, whether they knew any officers who backed up a fellow officer in a lie, only to have it "blow up in everybody's face." Several heads in the class nodded.

By recognizing that cops make mistakes, the instructors explained, it becomes easier for them to accept constructive criticism, or, in EPIC terms, an "interven-

tion."

"EPIC recognizes we're not robots, we're people," said Lundy. "People can understand the mistakes. ... It's the cover-ups that cause so many problems."

### 'A BULLETPROOF VEST FOR YOUR CAREER'

At the top of the EPIC training session, instructors showed a video to the classroom of a sheriff's deputy in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, repeatedly punching a handcuffed criminal suspect in the face as the arrested man sat in the back of a police car. A judge eventually sentenced Deputy Scott Krause to 18 months in prison for the beating. At his sentenc-

ing hearing, Krause apologized to other law enforcement officers for tarnishing the profession, Lundy noted.

Lundy and Hoffacker then revealed to the classroom that Krause, a military veteran, had recently come back from a tour in Iraq and learned his wife was leaving him at the time of the beating. While Krause's story illustrates extreme misconduct, Lundy said, it shows what can happen if overstressed and overworked officers let their personal problems affect their job performance.

"This is too dangerous a profession. There's too much at stake to ignore what's **SEE EPIC, A4**

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