



By J. Henson — The Capital

A member of the Sheriff's Emergency Response Team clears the hallway outside room 3-D at the county Circuit Courthouse in Annapolis yesterday. The team participated in a mock courtroom takeover, where a prisoner took an unarmed deputy hostage with a box cutter.

Sheriff's Office handles mock courtroom takeover

SERT has first live training

By HEATHER RAWLYK
Staff Writer

The box cutter a carpet repairman accidentally left behind in a county courtroom caught the young prisoner's eye.

The young man, who called himself Jay, was currently serving 20 years for assault with intent to kill. He was brought to the courthouse to modify his sentence. And he was desperate to stay out of jail.

These were some of the circumstances leading to a mock hostage situation staged at the county Circuit Courthouse in Annapolis yesterday morning. It was the first live-training exer-

cise for the Sheriff's Emergency Response Team, which was assembled shortly after Sheriff Ron Bateman was elected nearly two years ago.

The fatal shooting of a Superior Court judge, court reporter, and deputy at an Atlanta courthouse in March 2005 by a prisoner who grabbed a sergeant's gun brought to light the potential dangers workers and visitors face in court.

The sheriff assembled the SERT team to specifically handle similar emergency situations in the county courts. Members must pass a physical agility test and have been a deputy for at least a year. The team's 13 members

have been training bimonthly for the past 20 months.

At 11 a.m. yesterday, they put that training to use.

The second he was out of his handcuffs, Jay, the pris-

oner, took his chance, snatching the box cutter from the judge's bench and holding it to the unarmed deputy's neck. Only five people, including Jay and his hostage, were inside courtroom 3-D.

Mandy, a new court clerk, screamed frantically and a panicked college student observing the court proceedings for class

had a heart attack and dropped to the floor just inside the door.

The young man held

(See HOSTAGE, Page B5)

ONLINE EXTRA

• View a slideshow of photos from the training at Hometown Annapolis.com

CAPITAL 12 NOV 2008 P1

HOSTAGE

(Continued from Page B4)

the box cutter to Deputy Andy Bates' neck.

Deputy Sheriff Barry Walters, the hostage negotiator, met a couple of SERT members in the foyer and made contact.

Time is their friend, Sheriff Bateman said.

"These types of situations take time," he said. "Unless there is an active shooter, time is on their side. Communication and negotiation are important. They've started initial communication with him, which is great."

The sheriff and Major Rick Tabor wrote notes to be brought up during the debriefing following the scenario.

"Who would clear the hallway?" Sheriff Bateman jotted down.

He directed the question to Richard Speake, the Sheriff's Office's training coordinator. Mr. Speake is a retired sergeant with the Laurel City Police Department and former SWAT team commander. He became a deputy with the county Sheriff's Office after 23 years with Laurel police and has been the training coordinator for the past five years.

Meanwhile, Deputy Walters continued to negotiate with Jay, played by Major Tabor's 19-year-old son, Josh Tabor.

"You already got the deputy in there, just let the girl go," he yelled.

In the background, SERT team members discussed where to hold their command post. It's too dangerous to have team leaders standing outside the courtroom, Sheriff Bateman said. They chose a sergeant's office downstairs.

"A bullet could come through and take out one of our leaders if they're standing out here," he said.

Meanwhile, the negotiator convinced Jay to allow his team to pull the college student out of the courtroom.

Mandy, played by Major Tabor's 23-year-old daughter, Mandy Tabor, remained at the clerk's seat. She steadily became more frantic.

"The lady is a distraction," Deputy Walters said. "Why don't you let her go and we'll talk?"

"Yeah right," Jay responded.

In the judge's chambers, SERT members stood guard. One of them peaked through a peephole and alerted others what is going on. Mandy's screams could be heard from the hallway.

"I need help," she shouted. "I have kids at home."

"I don't care," Jay replied. Sheriff Bateman chuckled.

"They're brother and sister," he said. "They really get into yelling at each other."

After hollering for more than an hour, Mandy unexpectedly jumped out of her seat and ran to safety out the back door.

After two hours of negotiations, the team made a move once Jay starting beating his hostage. A SERT member walked through the front entrance, distracting Jay as the rest of the team barged in through the back entrance. A member deployed a safely modified Taser and he fell to the floor.

"Overall, I was very, very happy with the outcome of the day," he said. "They (team members) said they learned a lot and know what they'd do differently now."

The sheriff said he's planning more training exercises for the team.

"The more scenarios you put your troops through, the better they are during the real deal," he said. "But now, I'm a proud father. It was a good productive day for the citizens of Anne Arundel County. I feel comfortable now. If something were to happen, I have a good idea of how they're going to handle it."

CAPITAL 12 NOV 2008 p2