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Greenwich

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SWAT hits target in competition

By Debra Friedman
STAFF WRITER

Darting around obstacles, sprinting through courses and firing at nearly impossible targets, 13 members of the Greenwich Police Department's Special Response Unit achieved their highest ranking yet at the fifth annual state SWAT competition.

The unit came in 19th out of 37 teams state-wide, placing first in the sniper competition.

"The challenge was pretty intense," said Lt. Mark Marino, who heads up the unit. "We are pretty happy with the results."

This was the fifth year the Greenwich SRU, or SWAT team, competed in the SWAT Challenge, which is hosted by the West Hartford Police Department.

The competition took place Aug. 25-28 in Simsbury.

Marino said he was excited to see the team improve in its rankings and was proud to take home the top marksmanship title.

"We are steadily improving over the years," said Marino.

"The guys did a great job spending three days up there and really giving it their heart and soul."

The three-day competition consisted of 25 team events such as relay races where officers would alternate running a mile while carrying heavy objects, push stretchers through a maze of wires and crawl through tunnels enduring the fierce spray of fire suppression hoses.

In addition to the drills, there were also specialized competitions like a rifle, handgun and sniper events.

Two Greenwich Police range technicians, Alton Hall and Chris Girard, placed first in the sniper competition. Hall and Girard also took top honors in the sniper section of the competition in 2006.

The sniper competition required Girard and Hall to hit extremely precise targets from varying distances of 75-200 yards, Girard said.

"We had to engage small targets at unknown distances under time constraints," said Girard.



Girard, who has been a member of the team for eight years, said he was proud of how the team did this year.

"I thought the competition went well this year," said Girard. "We have a young team and their skills are improving and maturing."

Snipers are called into situations where police may need to counter criminals possess-

ing similar weapons or to keep tabs from a distance when officers are raiding a premises. Girard said the most important skill a sniper must have is knowing when to shoot and when to hold fire.

"Most of the time our main job is just to watch," said Girard. "We want things to end peacefully and we definitely don't want

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to hurt anybody."

The Greenwich Police Department's Special Response Unit was created in 1988. The unit has a selective entry process consisting of strict physical-agility requirements. Officers on the team are used to respond in high-risk situations such as executing warrants on felons and in the event of a hostage situation.

The team trains once a month, simulating real-life scenarios, at locations throughout town. Marino said this state-wide competition is an ideal training experience because of the exposure to other agencies.

"It's extremely beneficial because it's a team-building experience," said Marino. "You can never have enough training. It's also a great net-

working opportunity."

Other agencies who participated this year included state police, which ranked second, the Connecticut Army National Guard, which placed 12th, and the Bridgeport Police Department, which was 31st.

The top five teams in order were North Central, State Police, Central Region, Hartford and CREST.



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