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Inaugural BGD PD training class honored in graduation ceremony


By JUSTIN STORY jstory@bgdailynews.com
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Members of the first graduating class of the Bowling Green Police Department Law Enforcement Academy stand onstage at the graduation ceremony Friday at the Capitol Arts Center.

JUSTIN STORY/jstory@bgdailynews.com

The first class of graduates from the Bowling Green Police Department's Law Enforcement Academy is ready to move from the classroom to the streets.

Each of the 11 new BGD PD officers was honored Friday in a graduation ceremony at the Capitol Arts Center, where they had their badges pinned onstage.



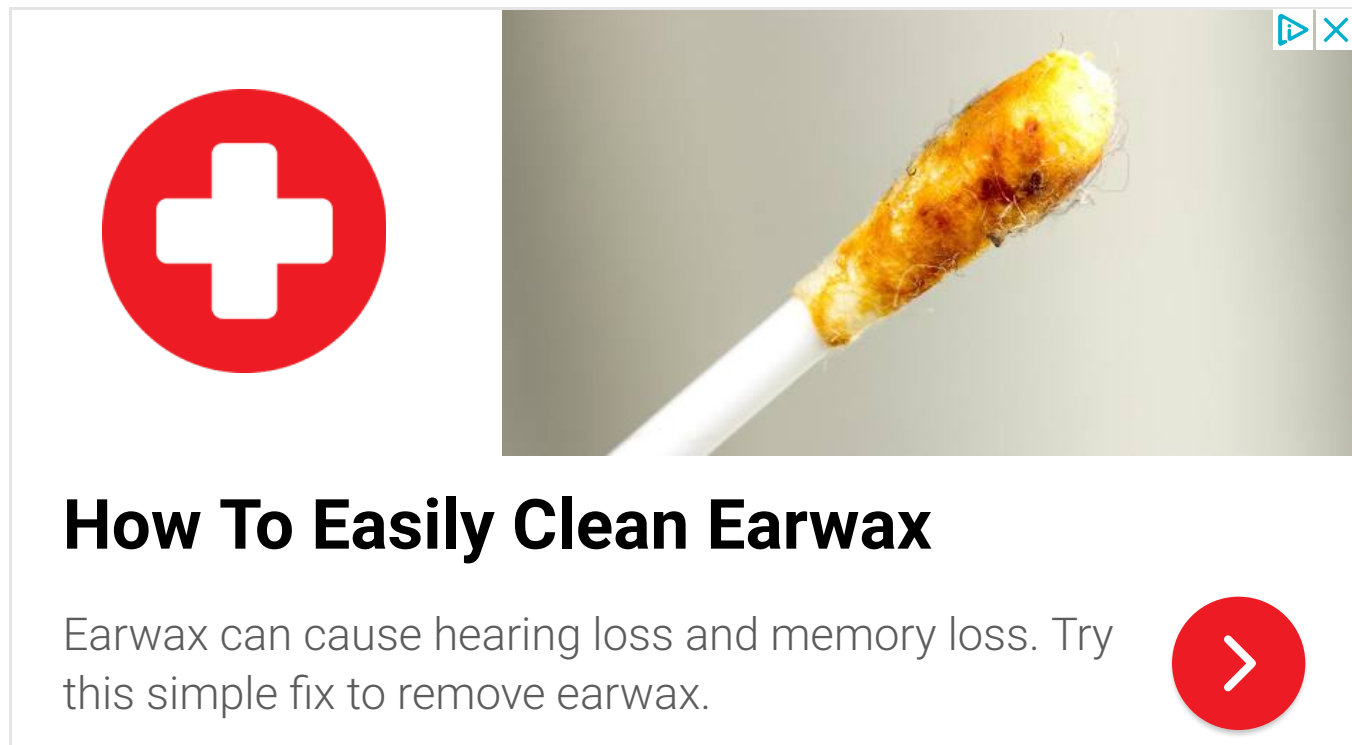
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The inaugural class of the Law Enforcement Academy began training in June under BGD PD instructors and local prosecutors.

“Through 21 weeks of blood, sweat and tears, we’ve come a long way with these recruits,” BGPD Maj. Charles Casey said. “They were very young when we started a while back, but if you look at them now, they look like Bowling Green police officers.”

Officer Jon-Spencer Smith was honored at Friday’s ceremony with the academic award, Officer William Belt earned the servant leader award in recognition of his efforts at helping other recruits during training and Officer Ramiz Becic was presented with the marksmanship and physical fitness awards.



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“We are a class that represents different races, different ethnic backgrounds and a variety of reasons as to why we chose to become police officers,” Smith said during Friday’s ceremony. “As a class, I don’t know if it would be more possible to match the makeup of our melting pot of a city.”

A Bowling Green native and Western Kentucky University graduate, Smith joined the BGPD after seven years with the Glasgow Fire Department.

Smith said he nursed ambitions for a law enforcement career for several years before starting in the training academy.



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“We’ve gone through, pretty much learning from the ground up, a very complicated job,” Smith said after the ceremony. “It’s a high sense of accomplishment to get through this and finally get to this day.”

Officer Poe Meh, a Burmese refugee whose family resettled in Bowling Green five years ago, is the first BGD officer from the Burmese community.

Meh said she received a lot of support from her brother during the challenging training academy, and she hopes to be in a position to help other refugees through her work.

“With the background I came from, it was a tough life ... and I saw what police officers here have done for the community, so I wanted to be a part of that and build and make the community better,” Meh said. “There’s people in this community that really look up to me and I want to be a role model.”

The BGD is one of five law enforcement agencies in the state with its own training academy, joining the Louisville and Lexington police departments, Kentucky State Police and the Department of Criminal Justice.



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An in-house training academy for the BGDPD had been discussed and its protocols formulated over a period of three years while the department was led by now-retired Chief Doug Hawkins, and the plan obtained approval in February from the Kentucky Law Enforcement Council.

Hawkins was at Friday's ceremony along with former chiefs Bill Waltrip and Gary Raymer.

Current Chief Michael Delaney said each of his predecessors made instrumental decisions in their approach to policing and training that helped make the Law Enforcement Academy possible.

“I appreciate their dedication to making this department something I'm proud of,” Delaney said. “I feel like these three engineers designed, developed and manufactured a Rolls Royce and threw me the keys and said, ‘now make it run better.’ ”

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Justin Story