



Rich Cooley/Daily

Warren County Sheriff's Office deputy Axl Ulibarri, left, Front Royal Police Department's Sgt. Zachary King, center, and police officer Scott Baker round the corner as the first group of officers to storm the third floor of the new hospital in Front Royal to locate an armed shooter in this active shooter drill on Wednesday.

First responders train for active shooter response

By Charles Paullin
The Northern Virginia Daily

FRONT ROYAL – On April 20, 1999, 13 people died and more than 20 were injured in a shooting at Columbine High School in Colorado.

Twenty-two years and one day later, first responders in Front Royal and Warren County held the second of three days of Mass Casualty Incident or MCI training exercises on how to avoid a situation like that with improved response tactics.

"Columbine changed the scheme of police response, greatly," said Tony Clingerman, a master police officer with the Front Royal Police Department who has a background in training for active shooter incident responses.

At the new hospital on Leach Run Parkway, Front Royal police, the Warren County Sheriff's Office, Warren County Fire and Rescue, staff at the hospital and Air-Care participated in training on Wednesday morning.

Rick Farrall, with the county's Fire and Rescue Department, oversaw the training as the county's emergency operations coordinator who would direct the response in a real life event.

Clingerman said the re-

sponse in Columbine involved first responders waiting for the SWAT team to arrive, which allowed for more killings to occur. Modern tactics, he said, involve going into a situation and eliminating the threat.

"The faster you can get that contact, the less lives are lost," Clingerman said, while adding that includes the shooter, who typically is looking to end their life. When officers hear shots, they need to make a split second decision and run toward them, he said.

"Being courageous is action in the absence of fear," Clingerman said. "It doesn't mean we're not afraid. It means we're actually able to push that fear aside and go do what we have to do."

The training on Wednesday included a member of the Front Royal Police Department acting as the shooter. He went around the third floor of the building, which is still having its final touches done, shooting blank shells from a shotgun as hospital workers hid from him. A simulated call was made to 911 on Tuesday by Capt. Robert Mumaw, of the Warren County Sheriff's Office, to report the pretend injuries and the response began.



Rich Cooley/Daily

Front Royal police officer Scott Baker searches the shooter after he was handcuffed in a hospital room.



Rich Cooley/Daily

Warren County Sheriff's Office master deputy Charlie Bockey plays the shooter as he runs into a room off the third floor of the hospital after firing several rounds of blanks from his shotgun.

Train

Continued from A1

A contact team of three – two Front Royal police officers and a Sheriff's Office deputy – entered the floor to search for the shooter. That meant strategically covering each other's back as one peered into a room and searched it before moving onto the next one. This team was not focused on helping people who might be wounded.

"They're just going to the shooter," Mumaw said.

Once the shooter was found, he was put into handcuffs and the team continued to secure the site. With that done, the situation was downgraded from hot to warm, and involved a rescue task force, or RTF, followed by an extraction task force, or ETF, coming into the building. The idea is to have the rescue task force treat the injured as the extraction task force followed up behind to evacuate the injured.

"It sounds extremely complicated, but once you practice it a lot, it's not," Mumaw said.

From the evacuation, the role players, who simulated various injuries, were taken out of the building to be triaged for treatment. A couple of officers simulated holding back a family member who was trying to enter the scene.

A command staff of involved agencies and building leaders was set up in the area to coordinate the teams that were entering the building. Front Royal Police Capt. Crystal Cline, who handles media relations for her department, simulated sending out updates on the incident and coordinating where the family of the shooting victims could be staged.

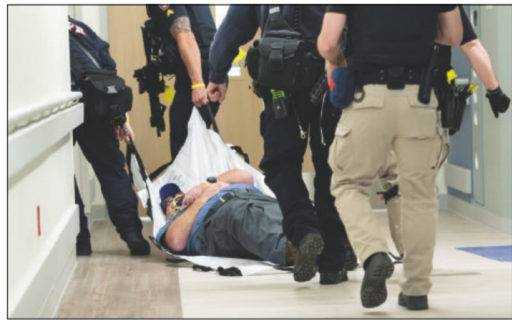
Once the floor was clear, the exercise ended.

Following the exercise, each of the involved groups debriefed the training among themselves before sharing their thoughts with the whole group. The exercise began at about 8 a.m. and discussion wrapped up around 11:30 a.m.

Because of poor radio and phone reception at the site, as well as different radio channels used, specific coordination of the response lagged a bit, a member of the Shenandoah County Sheriff's Office said of the contact team. That meant different response teams were not as ready as they could



Front Royal detective Michael Gallagher, left, and master police officer Jason Lethcoe, center, and Sgt. Travis Cave, right, provide cover for a Valley Health employee as she is taken to a secure area.



Larry Thompson, a maintenance mechanic for Valley Health, was one of the victims who was removed from the third floor in a rescue patient transporter during the exercise.

have been to enter the building to act, he said.

The triage crew suggested having the rescue task force team, which includes fire and rescue personnel, place an identification tag on people before they are transported to them. But another participant stated the rescue task force is focused on getting people out of the area to triage and they shouldn't worry about that.

The actors noted the difficulty in being able to recognize if it truly was a police officer on the other side of a door asking if they were alright. Being able to report which room they were in from the inside and turn off motion sensor lights was another struggle of theirs.

"It was very relieving to have somebody come and know that it was actually (a police officer)" one participant actor stated.

The training is a way of allowing participants to know how to act in real-time if a real situation occurs, Front Royal Police master police officer Jason Lethcoe, who has SWAT team training,

explained. While he, with the SWAT team training, may be more familiar with how to use a long rifle and approach the situation, a patrolman out monitoring traffic may hesitate in removing and returning his gun from his holster, he said.

"It's just a difference of training," he said.

Following the training, the leaders of the separate agencies will review their responses internally and then all will meet together to further discuss pros and cons of what happened during it, and ways to improve, Mumaw explained.

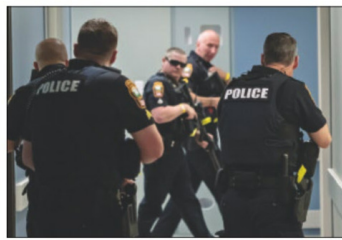
"The way the world works in reference to law enforcement and fire and rescue and active shooter response, it changes minute by minute," Mumaw said. "And then you'll have another shooting, hopefully somewhere else, that law enforcement, fire and rescue learn from. And then we add it to the book and then start training on that."

On being able to use the building, versus waiting for the summertime to use an empty school building, Farrel said, "This is

fantastic."

"The fact that we received this is a great opportunity..." Jennifer Condon, executive secretary at the hospital, said about working with the first responders. "It is a team effort."

Contact Charles Paullin at cpaullin@nvdaily.com



Front Royal Police Department members clear each room on the third floor after the shooter was in custody.



Front Royal detective Michael Gallagher, left, and master police officer Jason Lethcoe, center, and Sgt. Travis Cave, right, lead EMS personnel Matt Hunt and Scott Richardson to rooms with wounded victims.



Warren County Sheriff's Office deputy Trey Cornwell walks with a wounded victim, Judy Berry, a hospital coordinator, as Matt Hunt and Scott Richardson drag a victim on a rescue patient transporter to the outside of the building.



Larry Thompson plays the role of a relative as he tries to make access to the emergency room door of the hospital. Front Royal officers Jason Lethcoe and Erik Rosemeck successfully hold him back.

DESIGN AN AD WINNER: EMILY RINKER • VALLEY BAPTIST CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Quality Crushed Stone Since 1932

Flatrock Quarry:
Quicksburg
540-896-1441

Broadway Quarry:
Linville 540-833-2061

ROCKYDALE Quarry