

Counter-terrorism training for us ordinary citizens

BETTY BOOKER
TIMES-DISPATCH COLUMNIST

Sep 15, 2003



Contact Betty Booker at
(804) 649-6805 or
bbooker@timesdispatch.com

Folks, there's one more thing you can do for your country:
Become a terrorist lookout.

Who would suspect you? But if trained, you would know what
you're looking for as you prune the hedge, drive to the store
or stroll around the block.

And all you homemakers, commuters, delivery truck drivers,
home-based workers, neighborhood walkers and second- and
third-shift night owls could join the anti-terrorism watch, too, if you know signs of
potential terrorism.

Lt. Tony Martin of the Bedford County Sheriff's Department will tell you what to look
for at a program from 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. Friday at the Science Museum of Virginia,
2500 E. Broad St.

This free event is sponsored by two programs of Senior Connections/The Capital Area
Agency on Aging: its Foster Grandparent Program and its Retired and Senior
Volunteer Program.

Seniors, it turns out, can be effective at spotting unusual activities.

Many neighborhoods are changing rapidly. People find anonymity in transience. Not
knowing neighbors often leads to a lack of concern. Criminals and terrorists hide in
the indifference.

Martin is certified by a national nonprofit counter-terrorism training organization
known as CAT Eyes, the acronym for the Community Anti-terrorism Training
Institute. The organization's training is endorsed, among many groups, by the Arab-
American Institute and by the National Sheriffs' Association.

"Law enforcement needs all the help we can get from every citizen," Martin said in a
phone interview. But you need to know what to look for and what to do about it.

Above all, "trust your instincts," he said. "If the hair stands up on the back of your
neck, don't rationalize it away." He added that many officers pay attention to a book
called "The Gift of Fear: Survival Signals That Protect Us from Violence" by Gavin De
Becker.

"Terrorist activity takes place in very small bits of time over a long time" as terrorists are trained and plans are developed. "We need all of the little pieces of the puzzle."

He cited the 1997 example of an immigrant living in a New York apartment who became suspicious of three men who carried large boxes and packages into their apartment at night. They didn't appear to work. The man shared his concern with a neighborhood policeman who reported it. A raid that night found three suicide bombers poised to blow up the subway the next day.

What to look for includes:

- Beyond birthplace. "You cannot identify a terrorist by race or ethnicity," he said. Focus on suspicious activity, not ethnicity.
- Out of the ordinary. Notice things that don't seem normal as you commute to work, make deliveries, push the stroller around the neighborhood.
- Inconsistencies. Does that "construction worker" really look like one. Is that "police" uniform the real thing? Could a business really support a person's lifestyle?
- Packages. Beware of packages from unknown senders, excessive postage and wrong spelling and address styles.
- Car or truck bombs. Note vehicles parked in atypical locations at odd times or places. Is it heavily loaded? Can you see strange packages and metal drums?
- Chemicals. Be alert to packages and paper bags abandoned or left in a public place. Don't move them; call them to law enforcement's attention.
- Financial trails. Never give to door-to-door charities, Martin said. Millions are raised for terrorism through small donations to organizations fronting as nonprofits, often using children and teens as solicitors.
- Observation techniques. When you see somebody who looks out of place hanging around for no apparent reason, size him up. Note a basic description: size, sex, age, apparent ethnicity and any distinguishing characteristics. Note the make, model, color and license of the person's vehicle.
- New targets. As primary targets are protected, terrorists look for less-well-defended choices to wreak havoc, instill fear and get media coverage in an attempt to achieve their political or social goals.

Martin urges people to report their observations on the FBI Web site at <https://tips.fbi.gov/>. If you don't have a computer, phone the local FBI. Also call your local law enforcement department, he said.

"In this day and time, we need to take this seriously."

To sign up for Friday's free training, call (804) 343-3022. For CAT Eyes training, call Bedford Sheriff Michael J. Brown or Martin at (540) 586-4800.

Contact Betty Booker at (804) 649-6805 or bbooker@timesdispatch.com