

Trying to Avoid Another Sept. 11

Spurred by Tragedy, a Former Colonel Offers Antiterrorism Training

By LEWIS BEALE

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IT'S not as if Mike Licata had not already served his country. Twenty years in the Air Force as a bomber navigator, posted from North Dakota to Oman and places in between. Eight consecutive 20-hour days at Ground Zero in the aftermath of the terrorism attack of Sept. 11, 2001, working as a liaison between the military and the City of New York, handling the issuance of security credentials and helping with the requisitioning of everything from troops to trucks.

When the two planes flew into the twin towers, Mr. Licata was a lieutenant colonel six months away from retirement. He was looking forward to a career as a high school junior R.O.T.C. instructor and to watching his stock portfolio grow.

But along about Sept. 15, said the 45-year-old Mr. Licata, a resident of Cranbury, "I was standing on the edge of Ground Zero, and I said, 'God, if there's anything I can do to help my country, let me know.' Then I started talking to some people, and they were saying things like, 'Hey, colonel, make sure them rag heads pay for this.' They were slurring people, and that's when it started gelling in my mind what I should do."

Mr. Licata rejected the "rag head" stereotype. He had gone to military school with Muslims, served in the gulf, and felt "they're the same as us, they're regular people."

A practicing Catholic and self-described "spiritual person" who says his "religious beliefs have always been a guiding factor in everything I've done," Mr. Licata said he felt that all major religions essentially "believe in the same entity." But he instinctively understood that Muslims were about to become scapegoats because of the actions of Al Qaeda, and that terrorism was a real threat.

So he set out to put together what he refers to as "a terrorist awareness course for the world," something that would help people know what signs to look for, "instead of just going after Arabs."

The result is the Community Anti-Terrorism Training Institute known as Cat Cat

Eyes, a for-profit business that he established for police departments to learn and then pass on to civilians and community organizations how to recognize potential terrorist behavior. Information included in the program has been pieced together from the Department of Homeland Security's Web site, other terrorism training courses and Mr. Licata's own military expertise in emergency management.

Cat Eyes's two-hour "train the trainer" program, which costs \$3,000 plus expenses for a 25-officer class, is a look at things like the motivations for both foreign and domestic terrorists and how to protect against chemical and biological attacks. A multimedia concept that combines lecturing with a slide show, Cat Eyes also tries to teach people how to recognize suspicious behavior, and what to do about it.

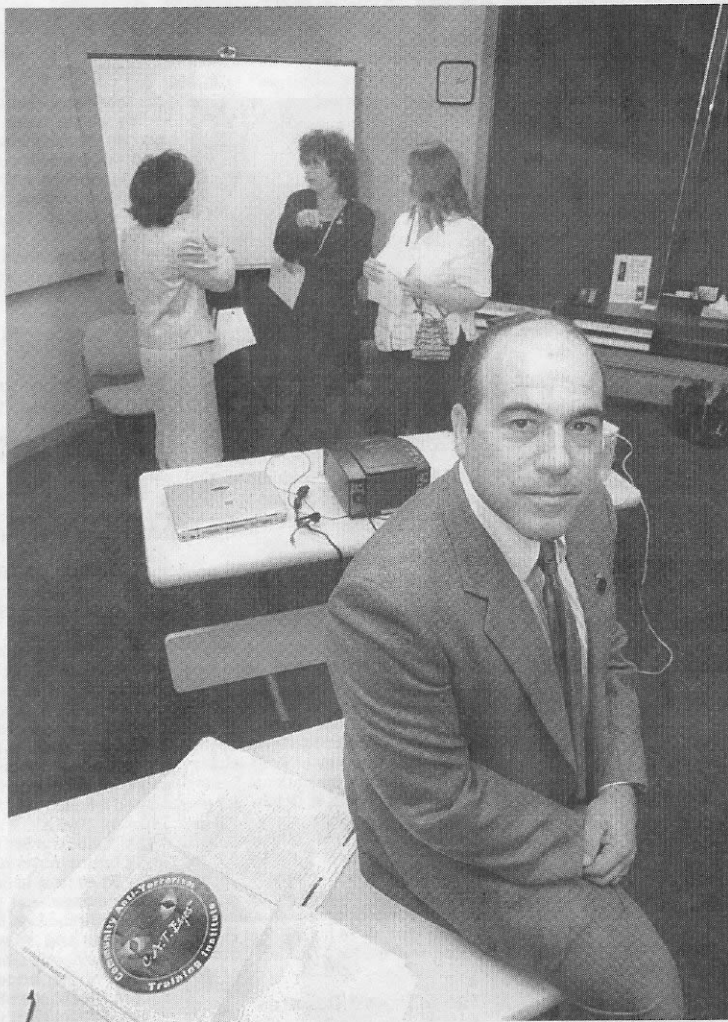
"If something strikes you as wrong, analyze it a little bit," said Mr. Licata.

As an example, he said, if you happen to be at Yankee Stadium watching a ballgame and see a piece of luggage that looks abandoned, report it to the authorities. "I don't know about you," he said, "but when I go to Yankee Stadium, I never bring a piece of Samsonite." Not everything is quite that obvious, however. For instance, Mr. Licata's presentation describes how terrorist organizations are organized and how they raise their money through criminal activities like credit card fraud and bogus nonprofit fundraising.

Cat Eyes also gives tips on how to identify possible terrorist operations. In the case of car and truck bombs, for example, Mr. Licata emphasized how these vehicles might show signs of being stolen (scratches around door locks) or carrying excessive weight (riding very low to the ground). Suspicion of possible chemical attacks can occur if strange odors (fruity, flowery, mown grass) are emitted from air ducts, or someone shows up to perform unscheduled maintenance on heating or air-conditioning systems.

The program also takes pains to instruct citizens on how to feed good tips to the proper authorities — not just "I saw a suspicious guy near the water tower," but a full physical description that includes clothing worn, hair and eye color, even the model and li-

IN PERSON



Laura Pedrick for The New York Times

license plate number of the suspect's vehicle.

Mr. Licata, short and stocky, with energy to burn and a lively sense of humor, has been married for 21 years and has two teenage daughters. A native of the Richmond Hill section of Queens, Mr. Licata attended military school at Norwich University in Vermont, and joined the Air Force in 1981 because he saw it as a way to escape Queens while serving his country and seeing the world. He spent the last few years of his tour at McGuire Air Force Base, where he commanded a squadron of 150 men, then settled in the area when he retired.

Mr. Licata says his program is nothing radical. "We're trying to do the same thing that block watches have been doing for

years," he said, "which is educating people on possible things to look for."

He emphasized that Cat Eyes tells people to report suspicious behavior to the proper authorities, and admonishes them not to get involved in dangerous situations. He also feels the program goes a long way to combat the racial profiling of Arab-Americans.

Jean Stanfield, head of the Burlington County Sheriff's Office and an enthusiastic supporter of Mr. Licata's efforts, said he got in touch with her shortly after Sept. 11 insisting that he wanted to set up a pilot program to teach antiterrorism techniques. By October 2001, a group of law enforcement professionals, town watch leaders and a cross-section of people from several Bur-

"I was standing on the edge of Ground Zero," Mike Licata of Cranbury recalled, "and I said, 'God, if there's anything I can do to help my country, let me know.'"

lington County communities attended his first presentation.

"People loved it," said Ms. Stanfield. "It met a need. It teaches people to be more aware of their surroundings, which is important for all crime prevention. It's not teaching them to be aggressive."

Still, not everyone shares Ms. Stanfield's enthusiasm. Deborah Jacobs, executive director of the New Jersey chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, is concerned that Cat Eyes in some ways mirrors Operation TIPS, a discredited federal initiative whose aim was to recruit a million letter carriers, meter readers, cable technicians, and other workers with access to private homes as informants who would report suspicious activities to the Justice Department.

"You could create a situation of people spying on one another, being able to spy on one's neighbors," she said. "It can create opportunities for people to take action on grudges they have against someone, and there could be calls for vigilantism."

Mitchell Sklar of the New Jersey State Association of Chiefs of Police says the best thing about organizations like Cat Eyes "is heightened cooperation between the general public and the police."

But Mr. Sklar added a note of caution, saying that overzealous civilians could not only pass along bad information, but also become involved in potentially dangerous activity.

To be sure, law enforcement organizations receive bad information, and Mr. Licata knows that. "Hopefully what my training will do," he said, "is teach people how to give a good tip and to analyze a little bit."

So far, Mr. Licata has made about 100 Cat Eyes presentations, from Massachusetts to Ohio to Virginia and New York — mostly to police organizations who have heard of him by word of mouth. And he has also given his course to the security department at the New York Stock Exchange as well as for Hapag-Lloyd, the international shipping company.

Despite the grim nature of his calling, however, Mr. Licata considers himself an optimist. Even though he believes there is going to be another major terrorist attack on American soil, he also says the problem can be eliminated by "making better living conditions for everybody."

"It's very hard to recruit terrorists when your belly's full," he said.

And unlike other small businessmen, Mr. Licata says hopes that Cat Eyes does not have a long-term future, and that the need for the program will eventually disappear.

"I hope I go out of business someday, that I go bankrupt," he says. "I hope it's the only business I ever build that goes bankrupt."