Securing the HOMELAND

By John Marini

THE FIRST OF ITS KIND IN FLORIDA, A NEW PROGRAM AT VALENCIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE, DEVELOPED WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY, IS HELPING TO EDUCATE LOCAL AIRPORT SECURITY PERSONNEL.

New classes at Valencia for TSA employees could be the beginning of a specialized certificate in homeland security.

TSO LUIS ITURRINO

"Our TSA leadership team in Orlando recognized that continuing education is an important element to improving the professionalism and critical thinking skills of our workforce," says John Daly, federal security director for the TSA at Orlando International Airport. "Our goal was to find a college partner that was innovative, proactive and responsive to the needs of the community."

And Daly found that in Valencia. "From the start, Valencia Community College was ready, willing and able to support us in this effort," he says. "As a result of their tremendous responsiveness and commitment to supporting homeland security, we were able to start the program two years ahead of our initial schedule, making Valencia Community College the first college in the state of Florida to offer this TSA program."

Last May, Daly met with Gaby Hawat, VCC's special assistant to the president for strategic initiatives and executive dean for economic development, to discuss the idea, sketching out the initial plan on a napkin. Hawat went right to work and after receiving approval from the Department of Homeland Security the following month, was able to have classes in place by August.

"Valencia Community College has been a tremendous partner throughout the entire process of getting the TSA Associates Program started in Orlando,"

>> Thanks to a new partnership between Valencia Community College (VCC) and the Department of Homeland Security, local Transportation Security Administration (TSA) personnel can now begin doing something most TSA employees around the country haven't done — go to college. VCC has begun offering classes that program administrators envision will lead to a full degree in homeland security.

Daly says. "Within only two months of being selected by TSA Headquarters to participate in the pilot project, Valencia was able to quickly develop the course curriculum, select an instructor and start the classes."

The classes filled up almost immediately after they were announced, and a total of 48 students participated last fall. Another 24 were added to the program this spring. The classes run concurrently with the traditional Valencia schedule, but are offered on airport property. The Department of Homeland Security pays for tuition and books, but TSA employees take the classes on their own time.

There are 1,200 TSA employees and 200 air marshals at Orlando International Airport and Hawat believes there is a big misconception about them. "The general public sometimes thinks of TSA employees as federal workers brought in from Washington," he says, "but the fact is they are all local employees. They are people from our community."

That's one of the reasons Hawat is so eager to help. Currently, 90 percent of the uniformed TSA workforce does not have a college degree and Hawat wants to change that. "Our long-term goal is to have a homeland security degree," he says. "Plans are still in the formative stages. The next step will likely be a certificate of specialization and then a full degree."

In addition to the classes for TSA employees and air marshals at the airport, Hawat says that he eventually wants to begin offering courses to the general public on campus as part of a degree in homeland security through the criminal justice department.

When TSA employees are hired, they spend two weeks in a classroom environment and then receive 60 days of on-the-job training. The VCC courses do not overlap with internal training, so there is no instruction on how to use body scanners or metal detectors or perform pat-downs. The classes are academic in nature and focus on history and theory.

The first course, *Introduction to Homeland Security*, teaches students about the various agencies associated with the Department of Homeland Security and their interrelated duties and relationships. It also covers historical events that have impacted homeland security and its most critical threats, as well as the various state, national, and international laws that pertain to homeland security.

After successfully completing that class, students can move on to take *Intelligence Analysis and Security Management*. This course reveals how the defense community operates and examines intelligence analysis and its relationship to security-management techniques and policies used after terrorist attacks, as well as man-made and natural disasters. The class also covers the threats these events pose to national and private sector defense, in addition to other vulnerabilities.

A third course, titled *Transportation and Border Security*, is being planned.

Daly believes that the TSA workforce is one of the most highly trained in the world, and that college experience will have long-term benefits. "These college courses are critical to further developing the professionalism of our workforce," says Daly. "This additional education furthers their professional development, allows them to excel as leaders in the transportation-security community, and improves their competitiveness for future promotions."

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>>A SAFER SCANNER

The controversial full-body scanners now being used to screen airport passengers may become a thing of the past if a Lake Mary company, Brijot Imaging Systems, has its way. Brijot's new SafeScreen scanners are currently being tested by the TSA and the company hopes to soon receive approval for their use.

SafeScreen utilizes the same technology employed by Brijot's Gen 2 scanners, which are being used to screen inbound passengers in the United Kingdom for concealed contraband, such as money and drugs. Those scanners have also been installed in other airports to detect theft by baggage handlers. Multiple Gen 2 scanners, with vastly improved image quality and resolution, are used in the construction of the SafeScreen portals.

The SafeScreen portals are safer than what is currently in place for outbound passengers in most airports in that they emit no radiation; they work by reading the natural energy that emanates from a person's body and highlighting any anomalies. They also protect individuals' privacy because they don't display anatomical details.

Brijot's new SafeScreen scanner

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