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Western States Hostage Negotiators' Association

TRAINING CRISIS NEGOTIATORS SINCE 1986

November 2026

Change in Board of Directors

On October 9, 2026, President Joe Miller resigned as President for personal reasons. The Executive Board made the following changes.

1) Vice President Andi O'Brien will assume the office of President and fulfill that term until April 2028.
2) The new President appointed Representative Lisa Cain to complete the term of Vice President until April 2027. Lisa will continue to fulfill the duties of district #2 until the elections in Salem, Oregon, April 2027.

Good luck Joe in your future endeavors.

Bend, Oregon School Shooting

WSHNA would like to extend our sincere condolences during this tragedy. We are thinking of our first responders and partners in Bend & Deschutes County, Oregon. Many prayers & thoughts for the families and community during this loss.

Registrations for Salem 2027, our 41st annual Training Seminar & HNT Challenge, opened October 1, 2026. Registrations prior to January 1, 2027, get a 10% discount per registration. That is a discount of $35.50 per person. Also, historically our room allocation at our host hotel, The Grand Hotel, will fill up quickly.

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Sean Pollack – Salem 2027

Inspector Sean Pollock is a retired member of the Winnipeg Police Service, having completed 24 years of service. During his career, he has worked in patrol, community support, specialized investigations, traffic, and spent time at the training division. He was promoted to Inspector in 2022 and commanded both the Operational Support Division, overseeing all special operations portfolios for the Winnipeg Police Service, as well as the Records and Reports Management Division. Inspector Pollock joined the Crisis Negotiation Unit in 2011 and was deployed to a variety of crisis incidents, including suicidal individuals, barricaded subjects, and high-risk warrants. He is a qualified Critical Incident Commander and was an adjunct faculty member with the Canadian Police College until the time of his retirement. Inspector Pollock is a member of the instructing cadre for the National Tactical Officers Association as well as a consultant for public and private organizations related to conflict resolution and crisis communication. He was awarded the Excellence in Law Enforcement Award by the Province of Manitoba as well as the Exemplary Service Award by the Governor General of Canada. Inspector Pollock is the author of "Answering the Call - Lessons Learned as a Crisis Negotiator."

Dynamics of Team Leadership in Crisis Negotiations

This session examines the role of the Negotiation Liaison Officer (NLO) across the pre-incident, active, and post-incident phases of a critical incident, and clarifies the distinction between the Negotiation Team Leader and the NLO within the command structure. Using the SMEAC framework and worked command-triangle dialogue examples, the session explores the NLO's working relationship with the Critical Incident Commander and Tactical Liaison Officer, the use of a psychological consultant, and the difficult leadership decisions team leaders and NLOs face — including replacing a primary negotiator and advising command toward tactical intervention.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Differentiate the roles of the Negotiation Team Leader and the Negotiation Liaison Officer within the command structure
- Apply the SMEAC framework to structure negotiation input at the Incident Command Triangle
- Practice constructing timely, options-focused updates for the Critical Incident Commander
- Navigate high-stakes leadership decisions, including replacing a primary negotiator and recommending tactical escalation

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- Establish debrief and member-wellbeing practices spanning the hot wash, operational debrief, and long-term follow-up

Alex Speldrich – Salem 2027

Sergeant Alex Speldrich has worked for the Lane County Sheriff's Office (LCSO) since early 2014. He has held positions in corrections, court security/transport, and main office patrol. He is currently assigned to the LCSO Creswell Contract as the supervising Sergeant and supervises the LCSO Peer Support Team. Alex joined the Lane County Multi-Agency Crisis Negotiations Team in 2019 and took the role of Team-Lead in 2023.

In September of 2022, his team responded to a domestic violence hostage situation at an in-home daycare. As this incident rapidly evolved, numerous unconventional negotiation efforts were attempted and risks had to be taken to reach a resolution to try to save a woman's life.

Learning Points

- Continuity of communication using different methods simultaneously: in-person and by phone.
- Utilizing other agencies for brainstorming and consultation.
- Considering outside-the-box negotiation strategies.

James Sylvester – Salem 2027

Face-To-Face Negotiation with a Suicidal Inmate

In 2021 an inmate exited his cell, walked to the second story of his housing unit, tied a sheet around both his neck and the railing, then climbed over the edge. This presentation utilizes body-worn camera footage to discuss the challenges of a face-to-face negotiation within a detention facility involving an inmate facing severe charges in a specialized housing unit. Topics addressed include time management, non-responder negotiations, scene management, challenges from a jail environment, emotional dysregulation, and use of a third-party intermediary. Key lessons focus on reducing unnecessary stimulation, maintaining clear communication and command structure, and recognizing that a subject who is not responding may still be listening and processing.

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This incident reinforced that successful negotiations are often less about saying the perfect thing and more about creating the conditions for the subject to regain emotional control.

When this incident occurred, Deputy Sylvester was a new member of the HNT and gathered intelligence on the inmate. The inmate's legal case was completed in January 2024.

James Sylvester is an active Deputy with the Washoe County Sheriff's Office (WCSO) with approximately ten (10) years of law enforcement experience. Throughout his career at WCSO, Deputy Sylvester has worked on the following primary assignments:

- Detention – Assigned to direct supervision housing units ranging from 75-115 inmates at a time.
- Detention Services Unit Veterans' Barracks – Structured and ran a program within the jail that assisted Veteran inmates connect with services afforded to them through their military service. Additionally, the Veterans' Barracks focused on reducing recidivism through positive peer support and sobriety.
- District Court Bailiff – Provided a safe a secure Court environment while also addressing calls for service relating to Court matters and the immediate area.
- Patrol Deputy – Spent approximately three (3) years working graveyard shift.

In addition to his primary assignments, he has served as a pilot on the Highspeed Aerial Watch and Knowledge (HAWK) Drone program, Honor Guard, defensive tactics instructor, Tactical Emergency Casualty Care (TECC) instructor, and Field Training Officer. Deputy Sylvester has been a member of the WCSO Hostage Negotiations Team since 2020 and was elected as the Western States Hostage Negotiators' Association District 3 Representative in 2026.
Prior to law enforcement, Deputy Sylvester was a Navy Hospital Corpsman assigned to the First Marine Division, and he holds a Bachelor of Science from Georgetown University in Washington D.C.

Outside of law enforcement, Deputy Sylvester donates his time to crisis counseling on Crisis Text Line and helps coach youth wrestling. Deputy Sylvester and his wife Alaina live in Reno, NV and have three children.

Tara Simmelink – Salem 2027

Tara Simmelink is currently employed with the Pierce County Sheriff's Office. She has spent nearly three decades working across a wide range of operational and investigative assignments. Her experience includes patrol, Special Investigations Unit (SIU), Domestic Violence, and

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detective assignments in Homicide, Missing Persons, Robbery and Special Assault. She has served as a Deputy, Detective, Detective Sergeant and now a Lieutenant in Patrol.

In addition to her primary assignments, Tara has served in several specialty and collateral roles, including Field Training Officer, Peer Support, Mobile Field Force, and Air Operations. She joined the SWAT team in 2010 as a crisis negotiator and currently serves as the Crisis Negotiation Team Leader. Over the course of her career, she has responded to hundreds of SWAT callouts and brings extensive experience in high-risk, emotionally charged incidents. Her approach to negotiation emphasizes communication, teamwork, and continue growth from evaluating every incident. As an instructor and presenter, Tara is passionate about sharing practical lessons learned, fostering resilience within negotiation teams, and preparing negotiators for both successful resolutions and the realities of undesired outcomes.

Presentation Synopsis - What Do You Consider a Win?

During a tense barricaded incident involving a murder suspect actively firing at tactical personnel, negotiators worked through shifting dynamics, communication barriers, and mounting pressure to bring the event to a peaceful resolution.

Told from the perspective of the negotiation team leader and primary negotiator, this debrief explores not only the operational side of crisis negotiations, but also the emotional weight carried by those tasked with building dialogue in the middle of violence and uncertainty.

This presentation concludes with lessons learned, discussion points for crisis response teams, and an honest conversation about the personal and emotional toll these incidents can carry long after the scene is secured.

Not every incident ends the way we want. But every incident leaves us with something to learn.

SPOTLIGHT ON MARK EAKES, VICE PRESIDENT OF EVENTS

It is our pleasure to introduce Mark Eakes, our dedicated, longtime Vice President of Events. Mark works behind the scenes with our host agencies to coordinate our annual seminars. Throughout his time on the board, his warm and personable approach has made every member feel included. Whether greeting a first-time attendee or catching up with a

longtime member, Mark always makes time for everyone—and usually does so with his inviting big smile.

Mark will be easy to spot at the 2027 seminar in Salem, Oregon. He will be milling throughout the competition, offering enthusiastic greetings, and purchasing what may be a record-breaking number of raffle tickets in support of our designated charity. Mark makes a point of learning each member's name and believes that building a strong, personable membership makes WSHNA the best association for negotiators. In our association, Mark represents we are stronger together, and no one will be left behind in the mission.

For more than three decades, Mark Eakes served in law enforcement, specializing in patrol operations, crisis response, officer wellness, training, and leadership. He began his career with the Pierce County Sheriff's Department in June 1994, serving as a patrol officer, bicycle officer, Field Training Officer, background investigator, and crisis negotiator.

In February 2004, Mark became the first officer hired by the newly formed Lakewood Police Department. He helped establish the agency's systems, infrastructure, hiring processes, and training program. After being promoted to sergeant, he supervised patrol and the Neighborhood Patrol Division while remaining active in community events.

Mark founded and coordinated the department's Peer Support Team and established its Crisis Negotiation Team, serving as team leader throughout his career. He conducted critical incidents and stress debriefings and advocated for officer wellness, resilience, and self-care. His expertise was featured in a documentary and national media coverage examining the effects of trauma on law-enforcement officers.

Mark participated seven times in the 300-mile Police Unity Tour from New Jersey to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington, D.C. A 27-year member of WSHNA, he has served as a District 1 representative and Vice President of Events and continues to serve on the Executive Board.

Mark retired in June 2025 after 31 years in law enforcement and relocated to Chattanooga, Tennessee. He enjoys international travel, spending time with his three adult children and two grandchildren and remaining active in the law-enforcement community through WSHNA.

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