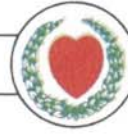


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The gentler sex fights back

Rape fears hike interest in karate

By Vito J. Leo
CORRESPONDENT

AUBURN — The women were smiling and laughing, but that was just nervous energy disguising the seriousness of their effort.

The occasion was a self-defense course designed especially for women and offered free Saturday at McCoy's Action Karate on Southbridge Street.

"Recent events have many women in our community scared, and as a professional in the self-defense industry, I want to offer my help," said Paul McCoy. He and his wife, Anne, have owned the Auburn training center for nine years as well as another one in Spencer.

"My intention is only to offer my services free of charge in order to help out, not to capitalize on recent events," Mr. McCoy said, referring to a recent rash of rapes in the Westboro-Hopkinton area.



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Diane Blair, left, of Shrewsbury and JoAnn Davis of Worcester practice punching techniques on a punching bag during a self-defense program at McCoy's Action Karate in Auburn.

That's why Deb Whitton of Auburn was there, along with her 14-year-old daughter, Chelsea.

"Two people very close to me were raped as teenagers and I want my daughter to know how

to defend herself," she said, adding that she plans "to practice with her so she doesn't forget what we learned today."

Among things taught during the 90-minute session were how

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Free class in defense attracts 50

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to react while under stress, how to ward off distractions while engaged in combat and, probably most important, proven methods of how to become the aggressor when attacked.

"Don't let someone say it's not safe to fight back, but don't let someone like me say that you have to fight. That's a decision you have to make for yourself," Mr. McCoy said.

Christina Howard, 39, of Auburn said she was glad she attended the training.

"I came to learn how to defend myself if I need to. And I'm a teacher, so I can help educate others with what I learned today," she said.

The McCoy's, both black belt holders, concentrate on a type of karate called Krav Maga, the official fighting system used by the Israeli Defense Forces and Israeli Police and Security Services, and by numerous U.S. law enforcement agencies.

According to Mr. McCoy, self-defense is the foundation of Krav Maga, which was developed by law enforcement officials in Los Angeles. Students learn to defend themselves against hostile actions, to avoid injury, and to overcome their assailant quickly.

Krav Maga defenses address a wide variety of aggressive acts,



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Matthew Bennett, left, an instructor at McCoy's Action Karate, demonstrates a technique to some women Saturday.

such as punches, kicks, chokes, bearhugs, headlocks, grabs, as well as defenses against multiple assailants and assailants armed with a firearm or blunt object.

Oxford resident Linda Robert, 46, says she's "better prepared to defend myself if someone attacks me. I wanted to learn some self-defense techniques and I did. I'm glad I came."

Mr. McCoy said he, too, was "pleased with the turnout of about 50 people, which was the limit for the class, and without a doubt with the change of attitude I see in these women. Plus,

we've taught them some combat techniques."

The 90-minute training session offered some comfort to Tracy Warren of Auburn, who attended with her daughter Paige, 14.

"It doesn't hurt to know some self-defense these days," she said, "especially now that I have teenage daughters going places on their own."

Mr. McCoy stressed that it ultimately is up to the individual when attacked to decide whether to run, fight back or reluctantly comply with the assailant.

He said statistics show that

women can cut in half the chance of a successful rape attempt simply by being aggressive verbally and physically or by running away, if possible.

According to Mr. McCoy, women can cut the odds down to 1 in 7 "by being aggressive, fighting back, turning your body posture into rage."

"There is no demonstrable evidence that shows that fighting back increases your chance of injury," he added.

The karate center offers eight-week self-defense training sessions that meet for one hour a week. There is both an all-female class and a coed class.