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The art of getting out of a jam

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ISLANDWALK — Jean Gomes knew the statistics. He learned that senior citizens are often the target of attacks and that the majority of the attacks happen in the parking lots of shopping malls.

With his knowledge and experience, Gomes felt it was a way for him to give back to the community where he lives. So Gomes began teaching a self-defense class series, twice a week, for residents of IslandWalk community.

Gomes provides the tools and techniques for people to defend themselves. His teachings include simply how to strike your opponent, get away and seek help.

"I'm not here to turn anybody into Rambo," said Gomes, who has been teaching the sport for many years.

"I want them to be encouraged that if it needs to be, they are able to at least defend themselves to a point where they can get away and get help."

Gomes attributes his own personal story as a factor in the road he chose. At 12, where he lived in Massachusetts, he was sent to the store for a gallon of milk when he was jumped by a group of kids who mistook him for somebody else. At that moment he realized that he needed to learn how to protect himself.

So he started paying \$1 a lesson for self-defense classes.

"I realized that I had to do something for me," he said.

The classes not only paid off, but he took it a step further and immersed himself into the teachings of martial arts, judo and jujitsu that later earned him the title as International Philippine Karate Association champion in 1974. In 2001, he was inducted into the Martial Arts Hall of Fame in Cleveland, Ohio.



Jene Gomes demonstrates on Frank Kalin how to defend yourself during a knife attack. Gomes teaches a series of classes on self-defense for IslandWalk residents.

"I'm not here to turn anybody into Rambo."

— Jean Gomes,
self-defense instructor

Gomes also served 32 years in the military and trained with a military task force.

Now, Gomes does some physical training and has decided to give back by teaching others at IslandWalk community how to protect themselves.

His classes include knife defense, learning how to use the kubotan, which is a weapon attached to a key chain, and learning how to disarm opponents using pressure points.

"When someone is robbing you, there are two things they don't want," explains Gomes. "They don't want to get hurt and they don't want to get caught."

"I teach people how to walk in a parking lot and how to keep their hands and what their

hands symbolize. The easiest way is hands up, like surrender, but not knowing it's a defense and an offense," he said.

"What you are telling the predator is that you don't want any trouble," he continues.

Self-defense skills not only teach you how to protect yourself, but also increase self-confidence. Steve Cutney, who takes the class with Gomes, was a strengthening and conditioning coach before retiring. He lost weight and muscle tone and wanted to try something different from weight training.

"As you get older, you become more vulnerable even though you're in good shape," he said.

Cutney recently visited Wal-Mart early one morning and parked in the parking lot far away. When he was done, he



SUN PHOTOS BY ALISON POSNER

Steve Cutney watches as instructor Jene Gomes demonstrates how to release yourself from a grip when being attacked.



Self-defense instructor Jene Gomes watches as Frank Kalin grabs Ron Mesarick's shirt during an exercise.

came out and noticed a man in a car nearby with his engine running.

"I needed to pass him to get to my car," he said.

But Cutney had no fear. He was aware of his environment.

"I thought that those

things I learned in class might have to be used one day," he said.

Luckily it wasn't that day. Classes are taught at 1 p.m. Tuesdays and Fridays to residents of IslandWalk.

"I highly recommend it

to anybody," said Cutney. "It's just the little things you pick up as you grow older are essential—even for the younger people. It's the little things that he teaches us that can really get us out of a jam quickly."

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