

Women respond to recent rapes

By Natasha Shepard
Emerald Contributor

Recent rapes in Eugene have prompted increased safety awareness around town, as well as caused a demand for more classes on rape prevention, several women's organizations said.

Christina Trevino, volunteer coordinator for Sexual Assault Support Services, said the phones having been ringing more at SASS.

"The phone calls have just about doubled," Trevino said, "and most ask about self-defense and other ways to stay safe."

Jennifer Beach of Womenspace said whenever assault or abuse receives media attention, there is an increase of calls to her organization from women who can see themselves in the same situation.

"The issue is getting a lot of publicity," Beach said. "It's a stranger rape, so everyone is vulnerable."

Though not necessarily related to the recent rape reports in the north Eugene area, Saferide has been turning away up to seven riders a night because the vans, especially the off-campus routes, have been so full.

Increased awareness and concern about personal safety has prompted action from both the University and community as they work to meet the needs of women frightened by attacks.

Self-defense classes have been designed to teach women to stay out of potentially dangerous situations and to empower themselves.

A self-defense class taught by Nadia Tesley is being included in the University's spring term curriculum, along with a class called "CARE," or Creating a Rape-Free Environment.

"It is important for women to arm themselves before they become a statistic," said Jeanna Weltha, assistant head instructor at Cascade Kenpo Karate.

Weltha will teach a free self-defense class for women today at North Eugene High School.

The class, initiated by North Eugene High Clinic coordinator Debbie Knox, focuses on teaching women to be aware of their surroundings and how to use their voices as weapons. The class also teaches the vulnerable areas of assailants and the knowledge and use of defensive tools.

"If you read the papers and listen to the news you know that (assault) is an ongoing negative aspect of our society," said Weltha, who has been training for 13 years in Kenpo Karate and is now a second-degree black belt.

Weltha has volunteered her time to teach a number of self-defense classes for women around the

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— Jeanna Weltha,
Cascade Kenpo Karate instructor

community. She recently finished teaching a class for ninth-grade girls at Sheldon High School and a class for young women aged 11 to 18 at North Eugene High School.

Knox said the class was put together because of the recent assaults in north Eugene.

Weltha said North Eugene High School took advantage of the media attention focused on rape and decided to present a class that would help women protect themselves.

More than 100 women attended the class presented by Weltha and her husband two weeks ago.

The class presented techniques for breathing and stance, and it focused on ways to not only escape a dangerous situation, but to avoid it.

"You must re-empower yourselves," Daniel Weltha said, "because 911 isn't going to be there, and the police will arrive too late."

Some girls who attended the class were concerned about the recent rape reports.

"I'm totally freaked out with all the rapes that have been going on," said Trezre Jacobson, 15.

Heather Bishop, 14, said she was interested in increasing her ability to protect herself.

"I came here because of what's been going on," she said. "I want to show that I can protect myself."

Daniel Weltha, at the beginning of the program, stressed the importance of defense. "Defense is a natural part of life," he said. "Everything that is living on this planet has a defense mechanism. You have a right to defend yourself."

Weltha showed the class a picture of his petite wife, who is a black-belt in Kenpo Karate. "If someone walked in here knowing one of you had been trained in defense, do you think he could tell which one of you it was?" Weltha asked. "He'd think, 'I'd better smile and carry flowers just in case.'"

Jeanna Weltha said women just need to start. "Don't let any obstacle prevent you from overcoming your fear," she said. "All you really need is to begin."

The class will be in the North Eugene High School wrestling room from 6:30 to 8:30 tonight. Participants should wear comfortable clothing.

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