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During the SAFE event, Florence Police Sgt. Len Larson gave tips on protecting oneself, personal trainer Roby Hodge provided insight on staying safe on walks and Bill Herbner from the Siuslaw Rod and Gun Club shared information on the club's handgun safety course.

"All of this information is to increase your awareness and knowledge of important things you can do to help ensure your own personal safety," Beveridge said.

In his presentation, Larson discussed three main topics: home safety and security, vehicle security and personal safety. "I'm going to talk about preventative actions you can take to protect yourself and your wellbeing," he said, urging people to be aware of their surroundings, double check doors and windows, keep vehicles and doors locked and be proactive about the safety of oneself and others.

Larson said that criminals prey on easy targets, so people who are prepared have a lower chance of becoming victims. He also encouraged people to "train their brain," saying that visualizing scenarios can help with reaction time.

"We as police officers do this all the time. When we're going to a call, getting ready for a traffic stop or going to contact somebody, we're always doing the 'If this happens I'm going to do this' or 'If this happens I'm going to do that.' It helps with your reaction time. If something happens but you've already gone over it in your mind, you're going to react to it way quicker," he said.

Florence Police Executive Administrative Assistant Jamie Gorder will make the presentation available. Email her at jamie.gorder@ci.florence.or.us.

"Remember, no one has the right to harm you," Larson said. "There's no right or wrong way to act — you will react instinctively to what you have learned. Practice and a good mental mindset will help you survive. Mental and physical preparation is key to this, it really is."

During the question and answer period, several audience members asked for clarification on the Carter Lake rape and previous incidents.

"We all learned after the latest attack that there had been two previous ones that most of us didn't know about," one woman said.

Carter Lake, nine miles



Left, SAFE organizer Jacquie Beveridge encourages people to use their brains as their best tool of defense in an unsafe situation. Right, Roby Hodge talks through a scenario with an attendee.

PHOTOS BY CHANTELE MEYER/SIUSLAW NEWS

south of Florence, is actually within Douglas County, which has made it difficult for people to find out further details, even though the victim was from the Florence area.

Florence Police Commander John Pitcher explained the difficulty in getting information about the case, especially because of the different jurisdictions involved. Florence police only work within city limits; much of the rest of the area is covered by Lane County Sheriff's Office and Oregon State Police. However, in this case, the incident happened in Douglas County.

In addition, social media posts — "well-intentioned," according to Pitcher — went out with an inaccurate visual account of the perpetrator.

"In law enforcement, we understand that with a traumatic, chaotic event, those detailed facts may not be accurate. You're in a fight for your life, and you think you saw this or the sun made it look like this, but it may not be accurate. That's why you'll never see a police release put those type of details out, because we know those may or may not be accurate," he said.

When people said that the accused did not look the posts had reported, Pitcher said, "That person is the person who did those crimes. Guaranteed," later calling him a serial rapist.

The best way to get information, Pitcher said, was to contact local law enforcement for the area a person is going.

They would have the best information on safety.

People also brought up other details about the Carter Lake incident, including that the woman had a dog. They wondered what she did wrong. "I don't know the circumstances," Larson said, "but it sounds like she did really well. She survived."

Pitcher added, "We don't ever want to put blame on a victim. We're a safe community and she felt safe. It just takes one bad person. It doesn't matter how big or small your community is, it just takes one bad person."

He added that the perpetrator is still in jail "and they have a very strong case against him."

Larson's presentation also advised that people take a dog or a friend with them when hiking; carry a knife, gun, pepper spray or walking stick; be ready to fight back or run; and scream and be loud.

"Fortunately in Florence, anytime anyone is yelling anything at night, we (the police) get called on it," he said.

After he wrapped up, Beveridge called Larson's slideshow a "Reader's Digest condensed version" of safety tips, which led directly into Hodge's presentation of additional information combined with a practical self-defense demonstration.

Hodge based his section on "SAFE," giving tips under each category: Smart Alert Fearless and Equipped. He covered topics from keeping one's cell phone battery charged to not listening to music and being aware of the environment.

"All of this is common sense stuff," Hodge said.

He also went over common weapons and tools people can bring on hikes, everything from a cane or walking stick through pepper spray, bear spray, an air horn and an alarm. He recommended using pepper spray over bear spray, since pepper spray is a stronger concentration.

"Your hiking stick is a great weapon," Hodge said, beginning the demonstration portion of his presentation. "A cane and a walking stick are the same thing. These are all effective weapons to protect yourself. You can carry a cane with you in an airport, on a plane, in the mall, schools, a bar and even a church. It is a great weapon for immediate protection."

He said an altercation between a knife and a cane is like a game of rock paper scissors — the cane-as-rock could knock the knife-as-scissors away.

"Which one would you rather have?" he asked. "With a



cane or hiking stick, you do not have to have special skills. In fact, it makes up for your lack of skills."

In a series of movements, he showed how to use a cane like a club that can swing toward an opponent, how to use an upward motion to break a hold, and, when held in front, how a cane can act as a warning to keep someone back.

"You don't want to wait until someone is in contact distance," he said. "Distance is your friend."

Canes with a curved hook can also be used to unhook arm holds.

According to Hodge, canes and walking sticks work well with a person's fight, flight or freeze instinct.

"When being attacked, it is built in your subconscious mind to pick up a stick. If you're hiking and you have your hiking stick or cane in your hand, you don't even have to draw. It's already drawn and in your hand."

He also advised using verbal responses to keep someone back, including saying in a loud voice, "No, stay back!" and "Stop right there!" Although it might look like you are becoming the aggressor, it could actually keep you safe from people looking for an easy target.

In conclusion, Hodge said, "Always be prepared mentally and physically for an attack, since you never know if you're going to become the next victim. Be prepared and practice. ... I hope this talk was empowering and you have a higher level of awareness."

After the demonstrations and a short break, Herbner spoke about the Siuslaw Rod and Gun Club's handgun safety course.

"The course goals are basic knowledge, skills and attitude necessary to owning and using a firearm in a safe manner. This is a beginner's class. It is not advanced, it's not intermediate. It is right out of kindergarten," Herbner said. "If you've never fired a firearm before, this is the class to take. If you are an experience shooter, you can still gain a lot of information from this class."

The course is sponsored by Florence Police Department and Siuslaw Rod and Gun Club. People can sign up or read more information at www.siuslawgunclub.com/handgun-safety.

"It is basically safety. Safety first is always prime in handling any firearm," said fellow instructor Glen Harter.

The two men summarized the class, which takes a full day. It is a four-hour class divided into sections followed by 50 rounds fired at the firing range.

"Practice practice practice. You can't practice enough," Harter said, who added that 50 rounds is not enough to gain proficiency. Closer to 3,000 rounds fired would be a better goal. "If something happens in a stressful situation, you are going to react at the lowest common denominator of what you have practiced."

"It's not something to treat lightly," Herbner added. "We basically recommend if you take the basic, kindergarten class and you go on to take some more classes and become proficient."

The club offers a firing range and additional courses, including how to attain a concealed carry permit.

The men also said that people considering purchasing a gun should talk to the club first, as the members would be able to help people match the right gun.

"If you don't have a gun and you want to learn, come to the class first," Harter said. "We have guns you can use and give you an idea of what you need."

A third representative of the club said, "Whatever you carry, whether it be a gun, weapon, knife, stick or cane, be prepared to know how to use it. Practice with it."

The final presentation of the night came from Adahy Lewis, with Coastal ATA Martial Arts. He teaches classes at Lane Community College Florence Center on traditional martial arts, real world applications, knife defense and firearm disarming. He also has plans to create a low-impact course for seniors.

"If you want to do it, there is a way to make it happen," Lewis said.

Sign ups were available at the end of the event.

Beveridge said, "We're fortunate we have people like Roby and Adahy to do this training for people, so avail yourself of classes."

If people want to see more events like these, organizers said, they should consider getting involved and leading future classes. Email SafeWomenFlorence@gmail.com for more information.

While SAFE ended without a set date for future events, interest during the event led to people signing up for personal training sessions, following up with the rod and gun club and purchasing, at the very least, pepper spray and a hooked cane.

"Our hope is that you will leave here better prepared to ensure your own safety and hopefully share these tips with others," Beveridge said. "And remember, your brain is your best survival tool."



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