

Local martial arts studio takes action in wake of #MeToo

Begins "counter tag" of #NeverAgain on social media to inspire others to speak out against sexual harassment and sexual assault.



ATA will host a free women's defense class every month in Cottage Grove.

By Caitlyn May
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It's not always black and white. And for Erin Lauraine, owner of ATA Martial Arts in Cottage Grove, she's helping women figure out how to operate in the gray areas when it comes to sexual assault.

"As women, we negotiate with ourselves," she said. "We say, 'This is weird but it must be ok.' Or we say, 'My friends like him so it must be ok for him to touch me like this.' But this is letting people know they have the right to change their mind," Lauraine said. "They have the right to say no and they have the right to build their bound-

aries."

ATA holds a monthly women's self defense class at its studio on Main St. and while the program has been underway for quite awhile, something changed this month.

The next class, being held on Oct. 29 at noon, is free.

Lauraine opted to lose the nominal free she usually charged for the class after going through her social media feed.

After sexual assault allegations began piling up against Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein, women across the country started sharing their stories of sexual assault and harassment using the hashtag "Me Too." The stories ranged from feeling uncomfortable at work—the latest data shows that since 2013 nearly 800 complaints of sexual harassment have been filed in Oregon—to rape.

"It's not always black and white. Sometimes it's more subtle and that can be a little more sinister," Lauraine said.

The self defense classes at MTA will focus on those subtle situations that can escalate into uncomfortable or dangerous situations.

While the classes will cover the basics of getting out of certain holds, landing strikes and what to do if you find yourself on the ground, it will also approach the precursor to those situations.

"We're going to talk about what predators look for," Lauraine said. "We'll go over how to try to make yourself not look like a target and to listen

to that instinctual voice that tells us when things aren't right, even if it's a social environment."

It can be a sensitive topic and so Lauraine opens her class to a specific age range—with exceptions. The class is open to women 13 years and older. However, with parental consent, younger girls may join.

"It's really terrible that we have to talk about this in middle school but some of these themes are relevant at their age and so, if parents want their younger daughter to attend, I just would like to talk to them first since we do talk about rape and assault," Lauraine said. The youngest girl to attend her class so far, has been 11.

Older women are also welcome. There is no physical fitness level requirement and Lauraine said the classes do not focus heavily on cardio.

"I had a 70-year-old woman ask me this and I told her self defense is relevant no matter your age and if you have limitations you need to respect, we can work with those," she said. "You should be able to defend yourself no matter your age or limitations."

ATA can hold approximately 20 people for classes and so individuals interested in Sunday's class are asked to call the studio to register at (541) 942-0215.

"They can also just come with a water bottle, loose clothes and athletic shoes or they can go barefoot," she said.

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