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Self Defense Classes Taught by Local Company Appeal to All Age Groups

"I Know My Plan" helps people learn to stay safe

By Deb Kelley 10:00am

When Wendy Vazquez Ernest starts her lecture on Women's Safety Issues, she asks the group, "Why haven't you taken a self-defense class?"

The most common answers: My boyfriend or husband is always with me. I don't have the time. Or, I don't have the money.

For over five years, Ernest has been a certified instructor in RAD personal empowerment and violence prevention programs for children, teens, adults, and seniors, teaching people how to stay safe despite their misconceptions or hesitations.

Through her company, I Know My Plan, Inc., she and partner Bill Pollock, a former University of South Florida police lieutenant, teach affordable 12-hour self-defense programs that are age-appropriate, comprehensive, and easy to learn.

"I think most people always believe, 'it won't happen to me,'" Ernest says. "They don't take that little step to take reasonable precautions. We teach the students that awareness is 90 percent of your safety."

Even though Ernest charges tuition for her classes, she offers a partial scholarship to those in need because the gravity of this issue.

"Money should not be a factor to take this class," she says. "I want people to be proactive in their approach to their own personal safety. That's what we offer, and we come to you."

Wendy explained how her program works not just for adults, but children, too. She said the RAD Kids program, or resisting aggression defensively, helps children decipher between good and bad scenarios.

"Most children can get in bad situations because of deception, like a grown man with a cell phone does not need a little kid to help find his lost dog," she says. "We teach children how to recognize tricks and different forms of deception and provide proven solutions for various situations."

RAD's basic program for women (13 and older), RAD stands for Rape Aggression Defense.

The course begins with talking about risk-reduction strategies and progresses to hands-on training.

"Most women have already met their attacker – a date gone badly or someone they know," she says. "This is hands-on physical defense training for an unexpected situation."

Ernest said the RAD senior program combines risk reduction measures with physical skills that are presented in a manner specifically tailored to the needs and abilities of older citizens.

"It also addresses the unique issues faced by seniors including scams and criminal ploys," she says.

At 5'4, Ernest doesn't look intimidating. And that's what WFLA Daytime TV host Cyndi Edwards thought when Wendy appeared in January as a guest demonstrating RAD self-defense techniques.

As she escaped her pretend attacker using proven RAD methods, Ernest showed size doesn't matter.

"The most important thing to do is to keep your wits about you and don't put yourself into a compromising situation," she said. "Realize what's going on all around you. Walk with your head held high, walk with purpose. Don't be texting on your telephone and not paying attention. If you don't look like a target or act like a target, chances are, you're not going to be a target."

Ernest also gives lectures, holds workshops, and works side-by-side with organizations like the YMCA and the Boy and Girl Scouts.

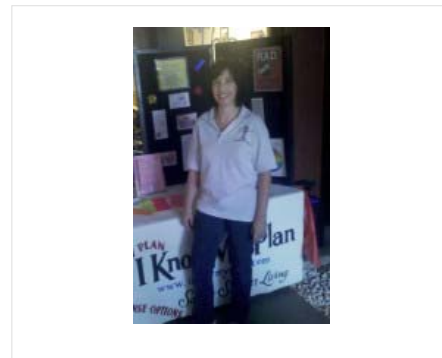
Ernest believes the bonding experience of her class is almost as important as the techniques taught.

"When you go through the program, you learn to work together," she says. "You can't help but bond with your classmates. This is a safe place to talk. What is said in our class goes no further. It is important that people know that."

Ernest advises that the RAD program offers attendees a lifetime practice and return policy, so participants can go to any certified RAD instructor in the US, Canada or abroad and take the class again at any time for free.

"We welcome people to come back and practice, because it's way to keep your skills fresh," she said.

Information regarding I Know My Plan's RAD program and upcoming classes can be found at Iknowmyplan.com.



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