## Defending your life

## Teens, women get hands-on in self-defense clinic

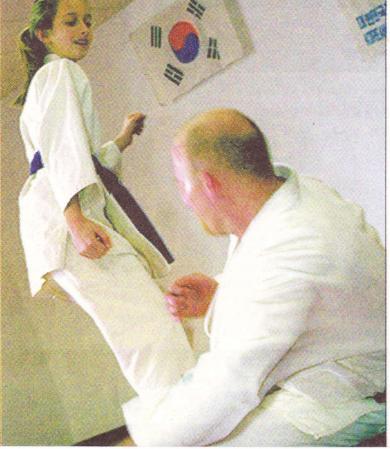
**By Romi Herron** 

Staff writer

While parents, law enforcement and school officials often work together to keep teens safe, some youths are realizing they need to do all they can to increase their personal safety. At a hands-on self-defense clinic in Lombard March 27, young girls and women learned heightened awareness may be the simple solution.

Self-defense instructor Laura Austria of Lombard said sexual assault, abduction and online dating often target unsuspecting females, so making wise choices is key to staying safe in today's world. At Chang's Hapkido Academy in Lombard, Austria urged clinic participants from Elmhurst, Villa Park, Lombard and Glen Ellyn to protect themselves with their minds first and basic physical techniques second, if necessary.

"With choices you're faced with making, in accepting rides from people, taking drinks from others or taking shortcuts



to escape or get help.

the ears or throat region and to where strangers abound. the class.

studies martial arts and volun- anything. teered as an "opponent" for the their guards down.

think (for young girls and

(an assailant) could be. There doesn't always have to be a reason." Mehta said.

Austria, fourth degree black belt, said common sense judgment about avoiding obvidanger

dren, teens and adults frequent Chang taught the partici- more outdoor attractions, pants to strike an assailant in including parks or beaches, use their voices. Knee kicks to Though everyone has a right to the groin were also taught in be at those sites alone, Austria said, good judgment with per-Sheroy Mehta, 24, of sonal safety in mind should Elmhurst, is a mechanic who always supersede a right to do

"Sometimes I hear women event. He also emphasized the say, 'Well, I have the right to go need for women to never let take a shortcut,' or 'I have the right to be out at 2 a.m. by "The most important thing I myself if I want,' and I tell them, 'ves, you do have the right, but women) to remember is to be how many rights will you feel prepared. You never know who like you have if you get assault-

ed?' Not very many."

'With choices you're faced with making. in accepting rides from people, taking drinks from others or taking shortcuts (when walking alone), if people

Austria talked briefly about abduction case in Florida earlier this vear in which a 13-year-old. girl was taking a shortcut when she was

first and basic physical techniques second, if necessary.

"With choices you're faced with making, in accepting rides from people, taking drinks from others or taking shortcuts (when walking alone), if people made better choices, that is a self-defense of its own," she said. Sometimes, taking precaution doesn't prevent an attemptvoung girls and women need to be prepared, she said.

Thirteen-year-old Rosa Laurenzana of Lombard was the voungest to take part in the clinic. Joined by an attorney, an engineer, a stay-at-home mom, and several high school and college students, Rosa and the help arrives. group's other members all had to avoid becoming a statistic.

ways to be more alert and pay tims. attention to things in many situations. This has definitely nique correctly, over and over Austria said. helped me."

practiced simple techniques al instinct in a real scenario." with trained adult "opponents"



Staff photos by Julie Astrowski

ed assault, and in those cases, Rosa Laurenzana, 13, of Lombard applies a take-down technique on martial arts student Bill Anderson of Glendale Heights March 27. Rosa was the youngest participant at the women's self-defense seminar at Chang's Hapkido Academy in Lombard and said the training empowers

> from an assailant's grasp, and on restraining an attacker until Chang said.

something in common: All want Chang, who founded the Lom- ed assault. bard school, said knowing even "I wanted to learn some self- one basic technique can make stage, in which someone either defense because there is so the difference. He said most much going on in society that assailants are people the victim can happen to people and I knows or trusts, and most do want to be able to protect not even use weapons in their myself," said Rosa, an eighth- assaults. Overcoming fear, grader at Sacred Heart School which can be paralyzing, Chang in Lombard. "I am learning said, is most important for vic-

again, so that it becomes habit,"

to experience the full effect. The pattern in some cases, which tim alone, so they are unable

moves focused on getting away gives an alert potential victim a chance to recognize signs,

Austria explained common Hapkido Grand Master Gedo stages that precede an attempt-

> "The first is the intrusion verbally or physically comes too close," she said. "That's where it all begins."

> Next, desensitization occurs if someone fails to put a stop to the intrusion, she said.

"Verbalize what you feel. Tell (him) to get away from you. "Practicing just one tech- Don't worry about being polite,"

Attackers tend to follow a assailant tries to get the vic- according to Austria.

fourth degree black belt, said common sense judgment about avoiding obvidanger ous zones, like teen drinking parties, after-hours clubs or poorly desolate shortcuts, can be lifesaving. In addition. she said. general

awareness is beneficial in dayto-day situations. An example she gave is for pedestrians on their way to work or school, or on a leisurely walk or run, to remain alert.

"Walk with your head up, pay attention, be aware of your surroundings and your own physical condition," she said. "It's all part of listening to your own common sense."

Jessica Artisuk, 10, of Villa Park, said she studied selfdefense for three years. She has taken part in presentations to motivate other girls her age to understand the importance of awareness.

Drinking alcohol is one way Third, and potentially the people slow down their own At the March 27 event, Rosa Chang said, "will become natur- most dangerous stage, is iso- reaction times, increasing their lation. That is when an chances for injuries or attacks,

With warmer weather, chil-

Holli people, taking drinks from others or taking shortcuts (when walking alone), if people made better choices. that is a self-defense of its own.' Laura Austria

self defense instructor

ing a shortcut when she was allegedly abducted and killed by a stranger. "When saw the (televised surveil-

da earlier this

vear in which

a 13-year-old.

girl was tak-

lance) videotape of the

abduction, it just made me cry because the way he grabbed her, I saw how simple it would have been for her to get away, to save her life," she said.

However, the ideal scenario, Austria said, would have been for the girl to avoid taking the shortcut, walking on a more visible route altogether.

Chang urged the women and young teens to protect their survival, and reminded them that criminal behavior and danger in society is the reason selfdefense exists.

"Be disciplined in making good decisions. Knowing how to avoid (dangerous) circumstances will help you prevent these situations. It's all up to you," he said. "Remember that. It's up to you."

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