

Published April 10th, 2013

Middle Schoolers Learn Self-Defense Techniques

By Sophie Braccini



Tom Westernoff teaches a safety class at OIS. Photo Sophie Braccini

also tells us about the stuff we should be aware of." Ryan Miller felt that the 'block and punch' was the most useful move he learned, adding that practicing is very useful for both boys and girls.

Although Westernoff lives in Moraga, a town with a good safety reputation, he is conscious of potential dangers. "There has been series of burglaries in Lamorinda. We all need to stay aware and watch out for what's going on. If you're walking down the street playing with your phone, you are not paying attention to what's going on around you," Westernoff told the students.

Westernoff wants adults in the community to maximize their safety as well. "When I get in my car, I always lock the doors before starting to check my phone," he said. He suggested kids use their keys or a backpack as a weapon if needed. He told them about street smarts and where to find help.

The teen girls said they never felt endangered in the community, but some boys said they have felt threatened at school and that the class helped them feel secure and more confident.

At the end of the class, volunteers broke a piece of wood with their fist. Girls were the first to line up. Everyone who tried succeeded in breaking the piece of plank.

"If you want to continue to be prepared," said Westernoff, "you need to practice your skills regularly and keep in shape."

In a recent letter to the community, Lafayette Chief of Police Eric Christensen warned residents that with the return of spring and prison reforms, risks could be on the rise. "I understand this is Lafayette, but I need you to lock your doors and windows when you leave your home. This one very simple act will deter a lot of would-be crooks," he wrote.

Moraga resident Tom Westernoff agrees. For years, the owner of the Karate and Fitness Place has trained Orinda Intermediate and Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School students to become aware of their surroundings and use self-defense techniques.

At a recent class, Westernoff asked one OIS eighth-grader to grab him by the neck. He then swiveled, crossed his arms over the boy's arms and, bending forward, pretended to kick him back with his bent elbow. This is one of the many moves Westernoff teaches the teens. For years now, he's been asked by both schools to conduct the self-defense unit for the seventh or eighth grade physical education class.

OIS eighth-grade student Thalia Ward said, "[The class] showed us different moves if we are attacked and

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA