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Life

YWCA offers free class to show women how to get out of dangerous situations

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By Catherine Kavanaugh
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CLAWSON — Jennifer Miles refers to her fist as a hammer as she demonstrates a self-defense move to free herself from the clutches of a stronger man.

She brings her hammer down on the man's forearm, nailing his radial nerve. Then, she pushes him away as he loosens his grip.

"Now you make your way to an exit," Miles tells a couple of high-profile students who have signed up for her free class. "We're potential survivors; we're never victims."

The students, Rima Fakh, 23, of Dearborn, who is Miss Michigan USA, and Catherine McGhee, 16, of Ortonville, who is Miss Teen Michigan USA, will learn more moves at the YWCA Oakland Branch, 839 S. Crooks Road, as they promote Women's Self Defense Awareness Month.

Miles, a deputy with the Oakland County Sheriff's Department, is volunteering her time to train women in self defense during a four-hour class being offered at the Clawson site.

"It's something I believe in," Miles said.

Students of all ages are encouraged to sign up for a session from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Oct. 3, 10, 17 or 24.

"Regardless of what you think in your head, you're capable of so much more," Miles said.

Oakland County Sheriff Michael Bouchard said his department collaborated with the YWCA and Miss Michigan USA Organization because domestic violence reports continue to rise.

"It's a sadly growing trend," Bouchard said. "This is another outreach program to show women how to avoid a situation and how to get out of one safely."

Students will learn about prevention in a classroom setting but should come dressed in gym clothes — no sandals or open-toed shoes — to learn self-defense moves.

After the "hammer fist," Miles demonstrated the "roll finger," which can be used to get away from a man who takes hold of a woman by putting his arm around her shoulder. She twirled away, grabbed the man's hand and bent back his fingers.

"It defuses a situation," she said. "It makes him understand you don't want his company."

Fakih, a kick boxer, and McGhee, who does karate, said they are looking forward to learning more as they begin their reigns.

"Empowering women is really important," McGhee said.

The YWCA can take up to 50 students for each of the four free classes. Students should bring water and snacks or a lunch. To register, call (248) 435-9100.

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