

## **Guest Column by Chief Dennis Naylor- Knowledge and Instruction are Keys to Safety**

As police officers, we see victimization occur on the level that most other segments of society never see. When we are called to help those who have been injured or violated in some way we respond, conduct an investigation, and do our best to ensure that the perpetrator(s) can be held accountable through the criminal justice system. Ideally, we want the victim to receive justice and most importantly, to feel safe again. However, even after we've done our part we know that some of those who have been victimized will still feel vulnerable. To lessen that vulnerability, some will seek out means to protect themselves in the future. The primary methods sought to achieve this are self-defense training or purchasing an instrument for personal self-protection such as a firearm, pepper spray, etc., which we will explore in this article.

I believe that everyone should learn how to properly defend themselves because the unfortunate truth is that there are people amongst us who have no apprehension about causing harm to others. Sometimes it's just a matter of being in the wrong place at the wrong time to be a potential crime victim. The crime-victim triangle illustrates that for a crime to occur, three things need to happen; there must be an offender, a victim, and an opportunity. If all three exist, a crime can occur. A proactive means to prevent this is to remove the opportunity for victimization. This may equate to maintaining a higher level of awareness, to avoiding crime prone locations, or in having the ability to properly defend oneself if in the wrong place at the wrong time.

To properly defend oneself, training must occur from a qualified instructor. This training must encompass realistic techniques that are rooted in gross motor skills and which contain a high degree of functionality and versatility. Finally these skills must be cultivated to the point in which a response to an attack will become completely reflexive in nature. Additionally, appropriate self-defense training should contain a reality-based component so that the mindset needed to deal with the physiological responses which occur during an assault, robbery, or other confrontation is duplicated. Unfortunately, all systems of self-defense are not created equally so the time spent researching a self-defense system and a qualified teacher who can meet all of these requirements is time well spent.

Some people feel that purchasing a firearm is the appropriate means for self-defense. As we all know, gun ownership is an extremely controversial topic so I will not use my guest column to foster any political debate, but instead to simply discuss some considerations pertaining to gun ownership. First of all, for a citizen to legally possess a handgun, he or she must meet certain legal requirements. In addition to the legal requirements, people need to understand that all confrontations do not reach the threshold in which a firearm and deadly physical force may be utilized. So simply owning a firearm may not always provide for a means of self-defense that will be legally justified.

Another consideration to keep in mind is that gun ownership requires a tremendous amount of responsibility. This relates to appropriate training, home storage, and carry safeguarding. If the choice is made for gun ownership as a means of self-defense, whether a long gun or handgun, then careful planning must occur so that it is properly secured and never wrongfully accessed by a family member, guest, or other non-authorized person. Another important consideration relates to properly being able to retain the firearm if it is carried on one's person so that it is properly secured and does not end up in the hands of an assailant. Lastly, consideration must be given to the thought that a firearm, pepper spray, or any other protective device may not always be accessible when needed. Thinking that it will be is simply not correct.

The bottom line is that anybody can be a victim, but if we put the odds in our favor, we lessen the chances of that occurring. To lessen your odds of victimization, engage in awareness to your surroundings. Avoid places that are prone to violence or criminal activity, and consider the ways in which you would defend yourself or your loved ones should the need arise. Whatever the means utilized, take the time to thoroughly understand the law as it pertains to self-defense, seek out quality instruction, and think realistically.

**“It is the mission of the Oneonta Police Department to provide professional services with integrity and dedication, to preserve life, to enforce the law, and to work in partnership with the community to enhance the quality of life in the City of Oneonta.”**

