

Beating the streets

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by Matt Wake ([Contact](#) / [Staff Bio](#))

SENECA — Please don't talk to James Bartee about "awareness." The retired Secret Service agent has heard enough lip service from other self-defense experts.

"My question is, what is awareness?" Bartee said. "To me, awareness is something you need training for. Learning to recognize danger is more than just film strips; you need practice."

On Oct. 15 and 17, Bartee will put on a two-part Street Safe Seminar. Both sessions are scheduled for 7-10 p.m. The free instruction seems particularly relevant after the Sept. 16 abduction of a female Clemson University student. Making the incident even more troublesome: It occurred in the shadows of the President's Home on campus and shortly after 10 p.m. on a Sunday.

Bartee has been conducting self-defense seminars once or twice a semester for around four years. Before this fall, the sessions took place at CU's Fike Recreation Center. However since moving the classes to his Seneca dojo, Aikido of Lake Keowee, Bartee noticed the student became more serious.

That doesn't mean the instruction is like an outtake from "The Karate Kid." For Street Safe classes, Bartee dresses in casual clothes and asks his students to do the same. (Sweatpants, sweatshirt or long sleeve t-shirt and workout shoes are recommended.)

"These classes aren't meant to be for a martial artist," Bartee said. "They're meant for the average lay person; the businesswoman, the nurse leaving the hospital, the lady at the bank, the mom."

Bartee's curriculum employs everyday motions not highly developed maneuvers. The emphasis is on self-defense, not action hero moves.

"That's where martial arts sometime miss the boat, trying to make you more powerful and able to fight," Bartee said. "But that's just not the right response. You take a 105-pound female trying to do a roundhouse kick on a guy that weighs 225 and is on drugs — it's going to feel like a mosquito bite."

The danger in being unprepared for an attack is most predators are playing with a stacked deck. Unfortunately, most people are creatures of habit, allowing rogues to plan out the most effective moment to spring. Attackers tend to choose targets they are sure will be easy marks. Thus, the assailant is usually bigger and faster than their prey.

"A lot of predators are energized with fear," Bartee said. "We work on breathing and how to fall, because if you get thrown down and have the wind knocked out of you, you're pretty well done."

The instructor's credentials are sterling. From 1975 to 2000, Bartee served with the Secret Service, reaching the rank of Senior Special Agent and protecting presidents from Ford to Clinton. Bartee's martial arts expertise includes the aikido, taekwondo, bando karate, daito ryu aikijujutsu and hapkido disciplines. The Virginia native studied under Mitsugi Saotome, the chief instructor of the Aikido Shobukan Dojo in Washington, D.C. Saotome apprenticed under aikido's founder, Ueshiba Morihei, for 15 years until the Morihei's death in April 1969.

One of Bartee's most frequent mantras is the "game face." The instructor drills the importance of remaining calm during the blur and intensity of an attack. To prepare his pupils, Bartee injects an element of chaos and fear into simulations. Assaults are an in-your-face experience and the Street Safe Seminars recreate that mania at a reasonable threshold.

The key to escape from a masher could be in the victim's pocket — and that doesn't mean pepper spray or mace. Cell phones, keys, books and even credit cards can be used to momentarily ward off a predator. If a victim is able to shake free, it's time to practice what David Lee Roth once called Nike karate: Run like crazy.

"If you can get lose, you need to keep on running, because once the attacker has recovered, they'll be back on you," Bartee said. "I like to say, 'A fight avoided is a fight won.'"

However, sometimes the best defense is to go limp and scream bloody murder, particularly if the bad guy isn't brandishing a piece. Although much of Bartee's instruction is contemporary, at least one safety standby holds true. The "buddy system" of never traveling alone on foot after dark is a fantastic practice.

"Having a friend with you helps tremendously," Bartee said. "Most attacks are one-on-one. I don't know if I've ever heard of a rapist jumping two woman while they walked Perimeter Road at night."

Of course, not all sexual assaults are surprise attacks. Bartee's sessions also cover date rape defense and prediction strategies. But whatever the attack, a person's will to survive can be their most important asset.

"I can teach all the techniques, but I can't teach you to be the tiger," Bartee said. "Being the tiger is 80 percent of it."

For more information on the Street Safe Seminar, call James Bartee at (864) 414-7425 or the Fike Recreation Center at (864) 656-2350.