



Santa Monica Daily Press

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FIGHTERS: Velilla Go, 77, (right) and Lawrence Rouse practice Cane-Fu at WISE & Healthy Aging Center on Tuesday.

Cane-Fu masters

Seniors learn the art of destruction, self defence

By **DAVID MARK SIMPSON** DOWNTOWN — It's Tuesday afternoon in the Ken Edwards Center and dozens of seniors are choking one another.

Justina Ozoigbo, 62, grips 66-year-old Lidia Palma's neck. Palma attacks the joints opposite Ozoigbo's elbows, pulling her closer, before stabbing at her eye sockets. Neither of them are smiling and there's something intimate about the intense physical contact.

Then the pair break out laughing.

Both Santa Monica residents were practicing self-defense moves taught to them by Master Lawrence Rouse at a session called Cane-Fu, sponsored by the WISE & Healthy Aging Center.

Rouse has trained in a warring form of kung fu for more than 40 years, and he's adapted the Chinese martial art for seniors.

"It's designed for destruction," he said at the start of the class. "We will try to modify it a little bit for you all today. How many of you think this is a passive class where you all just get to sit there and observe?"

Within five minutes, he's shouting, "Straight up, and rip!" as seniors swing their arms underhand like a softball pitcher, grab at an imaginary groin, and rip it back as hard as they can.

The class of mostly women laughed often.

"We have to learn this," Ozoigbo said. "If somebody comes around, now we can know what to do."

Palma, her choking partner, echoed the sentiment.

"No one can make us afraid, now," she said. "There are too many crazy

people in Santa Monica. We have to practice."

A handful of seniors brought their canes and Rouse showed the group how to use them as weapons.

"What is another good painful area?" he asked the crowd.

"Eyes!"

"Shins!"

"Feet!" the seniors responded, growing confident.

"Shins are brutal. Just a quick pop to the shin, BAM," Rouse said, demonstrating with a cane. "That gives you enough time to get away."

He taught the cane wielders to avoid missing their target by attacking at an angle. Later, he showed them how to hook an attacker's neck with the cane as the audience, smelling blood, cheered on.

Grace Cheng Braun, president and CEO of Wise & Healthy Aging, said the class was fun, but also critical.

"Seniors are vulnerable, and can be easy targets," she said. "These simple techniques for self-defense go far in giving them added confidence when they are out walking by themselves or sitting alone waiting for the bus. They can protect themselves."

Rouse asked if anyone had ever been attacked. One woman was leaving Disneyland when men held her door open and demanded all of her money. One woman was pick-pocketed in Spain. Another said she was attacked on the No. 9 Big Blue Bus because she moved her belongings off of a vacant seat too slowly.

Eve Berman, of Santa Monica, said she's never been attacked, but she took the class to make her feel stronger.

"I want to have the confidence that I will know what to do if I need to," she said. "This is mostly for self-confidence."

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Lidia Palma
Santa Monica resident, 66



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LIKE THIS: Lawrence Rouse teaches seniors Cane-Fu at WISE & Healthy Aging.