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Women tackle equality goals

Event marks anniversary of right to vote

By **Diane Huber**

Lacey Today

Eighty-six years after women were granted the right to vote, women and men are still celebrating and looking for ways to improve gender equality.

□ The local chapter of the National Organization for Women organizes a celebration each year, and this year's focused on breaking gender barriers and on women's safety.

"The theme is envisioning what it would be like to be equal. ... We wanted people to realize the roots of women working for their rights, realize things we have today we got from women fighting in the past," said Linda Malanchuk-Finnan of the Thurston County chapter.

The annual event at the Lacey Timberland Library celebrates the anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment on Aug. 26, 1920.

Saturday's activities began with an interactive self-defense presentation by Joanne Factor, a self defense and karate instructor.

The group - about a dozen women, two men and two teenagers - participated in an exercise to test how well their voice matches their words. They got into pairs and one walked toward the other until the person shouted "no!" to express boundaries.

"This is all just an exercise to get your words, your body language, your tone of voice to all do the same thing," Factor said.

There were some smiles, some giggles, and some not-too-firm "nos" the first time around. The second time around, the women got firmer.

Then they regrouped to talk about the activity.

"When Irene said "Stop," she said it very quietly, but the look on her face said, 'I'm going to get you,' " said Kati Arledge of Olympia.

Malanchuk-Finnan said she has to reverse the thinking that she's too nice of a person to use a loud voice.

Factor said it's important for women to be forceful because most attackers don't want to mess with a woman who seems likely to fight. Women should yell, scream and run before resorting to physical force, she said.

Arledge, a NOW member, said she came to the workshop for her daughter Orianna, 7.

"It's mainly an educational experience for her, to learn what the 19th Amendment means, to learn about self-defense," she said.

Greer Sommer of Olympia said she came to better educate herself for an upcoming radio show she'll host on 106.5 KOWA.

"I'm trying to learn more about feminism," she said.

She said there are still inequalities in the workplace, such as pay differences between men and women and the fact that women who want families often stop working mid-career.

"I would like there to be more of a global awareness, so that women and children and minorities can be cared for more equally," she said.

The group also did some role-playing to illustrate how women have been socialized to respond to situations a certain way, such as by calling their husbands to change a flat tire, even though it's something they could learn to do themselves.

"We can kind of recognize, oh yeah, next time that happens I can handle that myself," Malanchuk-Finnan said. "It's using all the resources we have within ourselves."

Self defense tips

Look confident and look people in the eye; looking down is a sign of submission - a quality attackers look for.

Look for red flags, like name calling, which is meant to stun the victim

Voice is the most important weapon. Yell "no" or "back" off like you mean it, and repeat it like a broken record.

Be aware of your surroundings, your exits and your potential weapons.

Use physical skills as a last resort. Aim for the face and eyes or the trachea

Remember to keep breathing.

For more information and to attend a self defense workshop, contact Joanne Factor at 206-920-8882 or visit www.strategicliving.org.

Get involved with NOW

What: Since its founding in 1966, NOW's goal has been to take action to bring about equality for all women. NOW works to eliminate discrimination and harassment in the workplace, schools, the justice system, and all other sectors of society; secure abortion, birth control and reproductive rights for all women; end all forms of violence against women; eradicate racism, sexism and homophobia; and promote equality and justice in our society.

Women's Equality Day: Celebrates the 19th Amendment, when women were granted the right to vote on Aug. 26, 1920. It has been celebrated since its 50th anniversary.

Information on Thurston County chapter: 360-357-7272 or e-mail lryh@hotmail.com.

Information on the national organization: www.now.org.
