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DM Heights resident and former law enforcement officer helps women protect themselves through new device ‘The HotShot’and self-defense classes

By Diane Welch

Del Mar Heights resident Jennifer Johnson believes that women build confidence and have empowerment when they learn tried and trusted methods of self defense. Her background in law enforcement makes her an expert in this field, and makes her more aware than most about the potential dangers that women face even in public places during daylight hours.

And now thanks to new technology that has been developed, Johnson is helping local women rest a little easier when it comes to their personal safety. As the regional manager for law enforcement accounts for PepperBall Technologies, a company that designs and develops non-lethal weapons, she is also helping bring a new line of consumer products to the awareness of the public.

A brand new device, The HotShot, will be available to the public this fall. It is a non-lethal device that has been designed with women in mind and replaces the more common pepper spray that women carry in their purses or on key chains. Local women’s focus groups, held in private homes in the area tested the product and gave it the thumbs up as being user friendly and effective. “Across the board, women have responded very well to this new technology,” said Johnson. “They used words like ‘feeling safe’ with the product, they felt like it was priced reasonably compared to other similar products, and they felt that it was small enough to be discreet.”

In comparison to pepper spray, the HotShot device shoots a large irritant cloud of PAVA pepper mist which is effective in causing a barrier for a would be attacker, as opposed to a stream of liquid put out by



Jennifer Johnson demonstrating a PepperBall launching device.

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the conventional pepper spray. It weighs a mere 3.4 ounces and can be easily carried in a pocket, backpack or purse, making it an ideal choice for housewives, college students or working women who may find themselves in threatening situations, Johnson explained.

A notable difference is the accuracy of the product. "If you miss your direct target with a pepper spray, you risk failure to defend yourself, whereas with The HotShot because it has a much wider range of coverage, it is a lot more effective," Johnson explained.

In conjunction to educating and empowering women about self defense with the HotShot device, Johnson is currently designing self- defense classes that she is planning to start later this fall. She has begun an interest list and women are already adding their names to that list. "The response has been most positive," said Johnson who will be offering her classes at area police stations, the specific locations yet to be determined.

Johnson's passion for women's self defense comes from her own experience as a law enforcement officer. Despite being slight of frame, and with an outward appearance that does not suggest intimidation, Johnson was able to don her uniform and bring to the fore the required sense of authority. "I guess that there are really two sides to my persona and when I was in uniform I was able to use my more assertive side," she explained.

Before joining the police academy, Johnson had worked in loss prevention as a security officer for Macy's Department store, apprehending shoplifters. At the time she was a student at Sacramento State University working toward her degree in criminal justice. Prior to going to college, Johnson, a San Diego native, had graduated from Torrey Pines High School in 1996. "Once I had graduated from college, I realized that I needed to think of a suitable career so I applied to Sacramento Police Department, and I became an officer there." The training at the academy was intense, said Johnson. "Not just physical training but the academics were rigorous, too." Police Academy students have to learn the penal codes of California as well defensive tactics. In a class of about 40, there were about half a dozen women. About 30 ultimately made it through the academy's tough schooling and graduated along with Johnson in 2002.

A transfer to Carlsbad Police Department brought Johnson back to the San Diego area and closer to her family. She spent three years as a patrol officer and a crime scene investigator during that time. The biggest challenge for Johnson was dealing with the stark realization of how people can reach such low points in their lives. "I saw a lot of young people on drugs, who had somehow got steered down the wrong path, and didn't make the right choices in life. It was very sad." Also making repeat calls to the same homes where domestic crime had been reported was a frustrating aspect of Johnson's work. "You do what you can to help, but at the end of the day it's up to these people to make the changes." This was also the motivating factor for Johnson to segue into the private sector.

In 2006 she went to work for a private DNA lab that had been started by a retired Carlsbad police sergeant. She was hired to work in sales—the company sold DNA testing to the law enforcement industry. But after only two months the company founder suddenly died of cancer and the business stalled then closed after only a year. Johnson was laid off but was able to find employment with PepperBall Technologies. "It was a perfect fit, because I had the law enforcement agency experience and I had the sales experience."

But Johnson said that she misses the defensive tactics training that was part of the ongoing recurrent training in the police force, and has a firm belief that women would benefit from learning how to defend themselves. She sees herself as a genuine role model for teaching women in this capacity. "I have the advantage of being a smaller female, and yet have had first hand experience using defensive tactics. And I have also personally seen the types of crimes that women have to deal with," Johnson said. "So a class like this would be the ideal way for women to be aware and to be prepared to defend themselves." To find out more about Johnson's upcoming defensive tactic classes or to be added to an interest list, email her at jjohnson@pepperball.com. To learn more about PepperBall Technology's non-lethal devices visit www.pepperball.com

