

New South Side Gun Club Strives To 'Empower' Women

By Andrea V. Watson (//www.dnainfo.com/chicago/about-us/our-team/editorial-team/andrea-v-watson) | June 29, 2017 6:18am

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Javondlynn M. Dunagan opened JMD Defense & Investigations to teach women how to safely handle and use guns.

DNAinfo/Andrea V. Watson

BEVERLY— Although Javondlynn M. Dunagan teaches firearms and self-defense courses on the South Side, she admits she used to be afraid of guns.

The Grand Crossing native worked as a federal probation officer for 25 years, but she said she never had to carry a gun — and she didn't want to.

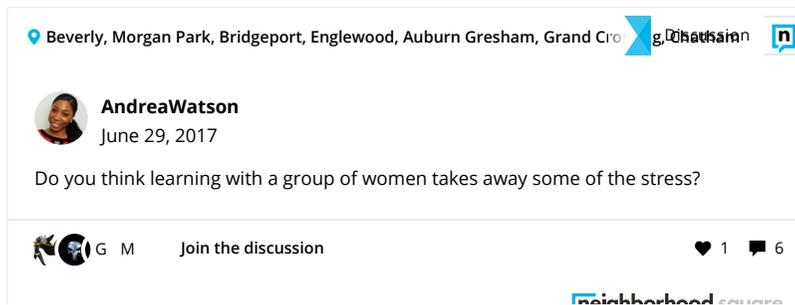
“I used to look at a gun and think it was just going to jump off the table,” Dunagan said.

But she had to overcome that fear when she got divorced from her husband, who was a police officer.

"I felt uncomfortable not having a gun in the house" anymore, she said.

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That's when she decided to take classes in 2013 to learn how to safely handle and use a gun.



"I said, 'I'm going to tackle this fear and start carrying a gun, and I'm going to get over this,' and it turned out I fell in love with firearms," she said.

Dunagan began going to gun ranges alone to practice. She said she rarely saw other women, especially African-American women.



Javondlynn M. Dunagan opened JMD Defense & Investigations in Beverly to teach women how to safely handle and use guns. [Provided by Javondlynn M. Dunagan]

When her daughter, now a senior at Clark Atlanta University, was preparing to go away to college, Dunagan said she looked to enroll her in some sort of self-defense class, but couldn't find any on the South Side.

When she retired in January 2016, Dunagan decided to open her own business where women could comfortably learn how to use a gun and learn self-defense.

She opened JMD Defense & Investigations LLC, 1447 W. 103rd St., in March.



Javondlynn M. Dunagan started a gun club for women on the South Side. [Provided by Javondlynn M. Dunagan]

“I said if I used to be afraid of guns and now I’m loving this, I’m certain there are other women who have this same fear, and so I started talking to other ladies, and it was the same thing,” Dunagan said.

The classes are strictly for women, and the club already has 17 members who meet twice a month.

“We go to dinner, we go to the movies, we travel, but we don’t go shooting together, so now there’s the gun club,” she said.

Gun club member Sheryl Franklin of Washington Heights said she highly recommends the introduction to firearms course. She took her first one in April.

She said she wanted to feel comfortable at a gun range, so she signed up.

“Her service did just that,” Franklin said. “It’s a small setting, so you don’t get in the crowd, and you can interact with the instructor. They take the time to break down how to handle the different firearms and how to be safe, which is most important.”

Franklin said she couldn't find any concealed-carry classes on the South Side, especially none taught by a woman.

"That really impressed me," she said. "I was excited about it because there was finally someone who understood my fear of guns, overcame it and was now sharing that with women."

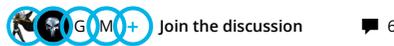
Even if a woman chooses not to use a gun for personal reasons, Dunagan encourages women to learn self-defense.

"We all need to learn something and take responsibility for our own defense," she said, adding that it's all about "empowering" women.

She offers "Mommy and Me Self Defense" classes for girls 8-18. The next one is July 22 for \$80 for two. There's an intro to firearms course July 8 for \$125 and a \$50 self-defense class coming up on July 22 and Aug. 5 for college-bound teen girls.

Women can register and pay online at www.jmddefense.com (<http://www.jmddefense.com/>).

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