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WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2015

VOL. 52 No. 2

SUNSENTINEL.COM/BROWARD

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CONTRASTS AND COMPLEMENTS Firearms instructor Michael Coker uses his background in reiki healing to enhance his gun-safety courses. STAFF PHOTO/BETH BLACK

Shooting instructor offers lesson in duality

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To the uninitiated, Michael Coker is a study in contrasts.

The soulful Coral Springs reiki master is also a state certified firearms and defensive tactics instructor. He is a licensed massage therapist and a certified personal trainer. He knows his way around the body's anatomy and can chart every chakra; but he's equally adept as a certified chief range officer.

And if that wasn't enough, as an ordained minister he conducts med-

itation workshops throughout Broward County.

But for Coker, a former Broward Sheriff's Office deputy and Miami-Dade County corrections officer, these elements are not contraries. But rather the yin and yang that make the whole.

"If you understand [the Chinese philosophy of] yin and yang, you understand the importance of balance," said Coker, the 49-year-old founder and owner of Florida Firearm Safety. "If you focus solely

on the divine feminine, you're forgetting the divine masculine. And then you're out of balance; there's no ground."

Even during the past year of highly-publicized mass shootings, terror, and heightened vigilance, Coker remains a man at perfect peace.

"When I teach a class, I teach how not to use a gun unless you absolutely have to," he said. "The last thing I want [students] to do is shoot. I teach people

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Creek wins Let's Move gold

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Coconut Creek has been awarded top honors in a national program aimed at improving fitness levels in communities around the country.

The city, among roughly 500 communities throughout the United States, has won gold honors in five target areas of the Let's Move! Cities, Towns and Counties initiative organized by the National League of Cities. The achievement now ranks the city as No. 1 in the nation.

"We had been working on the goals for the last two and a half years," Parks and Recreation Supervisor Janet Hull said. "We had to implement different benchmarks in order to get to gold in each of the five categories."

The city's Parks and Recreation Department, which spearheaded the implementation of the program, received support from the human re-

sources department as well as other organizations.

"West Boca Medical Center provided help; so did Publix by offering fruits at our 'Let's Move!' events," Hull said. "Flip-a-ny offered free training to local child care providers."

Among those delighted by the achievement is Mayor Becky Tooley.

"I am very proud of this award; it is quite an honor," she said. "We took off with the program; the parents and the kids love it. It is an outstanding accomplishment for our Parks and Recreation Department."

The National League of Cities' program is a component of Michelle Obama's 'Let's Move!' initiative, which focuses on reducing childhood obesity.

"Our achievement is proof of our commitment

to make the community healthier," Hull said. "It is all about retraining the thought process of parents; less screen time, less computer time and more use of the city's parks is what we want to see."

Coconut Creek is the fifth city in the state to be ranked first, after Greenacres, Orlando, North Miami and New Port Richey. By winning gold in all five areas, Coconut Creek has now become eligible for the 'Let's Move! All Star' city award. The city has to pursue eight strategies that have been developed by the national League of Cities and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

"Becoming an All Star city requires a lot of work," Hull said. "It is not just about parks and recreation; it involves greenways, bike lanes and many other things. We are going to try our best to reach that goal."

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MASTER AND INSTRUCTOR Michael Coker watches as his student, Robert Santiago, positions himself to shoot during a practice session at Nexus Shooting Range in Davie. Santiago says he found that Coker's methods of teaching, which are based on the principles he teaches as a reiki master, have assisted him in improving his shooting. STAFF PHOTOS/BETH BLACK



YIN AND YANG Michael Coker, a reiki master and certified firearm instructor, demonstrates the proper way to load and handle a firearm.

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 to be aware of their surroundings at all times to help avoid trouble. But in a worst case scenario, I'd rather have something and not need it, than need something and not have it."

It's a balance that Coker knows well. In fact, he knows firsthand what it's like to be out of balance. While working in law enforcement, he said, he became headstrong.

"When my career was progressing rapidly, I really wanted to succeed," he said. "I was pushing, pushing, pushing, and I lost myself in that."

After 15 years, he left law enforcement to study massage therapy and reiki healing and even gave away all of his guns.

"But one day I realized I was once again missing half of myself," Coker said. "I recognized there is a need for enlightened firearms training and that I can provide it from a spiritual perspective."

Roberto Santiago is a local gun owner who met

Coker a year ago while taking one of his courses.

"Training under [him] at the range is a mental and physical journey, and you leave better skilled, re-

laxed and at peace," said Santiago, also a Nichiren Buddhist. Santiago said he initially wanted to learn how to defend himself.

"It seems like a dichotomy," he said. "But shooting is very spiritual, very Buddhist, in that I'm responsible for doing this correctly and the key to doing that is

relaxation, confidence and knowledge."

Most impressive, Santiago said, is Coker's thoroughness in his classes,

which includes one specifically for women.

"He focuses on the responsibility of the law abiding citizen," he said. "Students understand that ignorance of the law is no excuse, and that safety is paramount."

But personal responsibility is key to Coker's philosophy.

"Having a gun reminds me that I have the ability to destroy someone's life and I don't want to do that," he said. "It's a reminder that I am responsible for my actions."

"And should trouble find me, I still may not shoot," he said, bowing slightly, his fingertips pressed together in silent prayer. "Maybe that person will look in my eyes and say 'Damn man, I'm sorry,' and walk away."



BALANCE Reiki master and certified firearm instructor Michael Coker takes a hands-on approach with his students, saying he has found that it is a way to put them at ease and keep them calm and steady while they learn to shoot.

To learn more about Michael Coker's firearm safety classes, call 954-328-1599 or email Michael@FloridaFirearmSafety.net. Visit UniversalReikiCenter.com.