

# Cape man named Law Enforcement Trainer of the Year



## Martial Arts Hall of Fame recognizes Santella

By KEVIN DUFFY Breeze Staff Writer

Dedication and hard work has paid off in the form of national recognition for a Cape Coral resident with a knack for self-defense.

Jeff Santella, a northwest Cape resident and police officer for the city of Sanibel, was recognized as Law Enforcement Trainer of the Year by the U.S. Martial Arts Hall of Fame during its annual awards and induction banquet, held Aug. 18 in Tulsa, OK. He is the lead instructor for ASLET (American Society of Law Enforcement

Trainers).

"I was really glad; This is one of the few awards I have not received before," he said. "I was really looking forward to getting it. I was definitely pleased."

Santella was with the Lee County Sheriff's Office from 1984-91 before transferring to Sanibel.

He first began training in the martial arts in 1979, and has been teaching it to law enforcement for the last 12 years.

"I was a young kid in New York City, and we would go to the Kung Fu theater on Sundays." Santella said of his earliest exposure to the discipline. "That's my

first recollection of the martial arts."

Santella, 35, moved to Cape Coral from New Jersey in 1980. In 1986, he founded the Street Defense Systems Institute. Inc., based in Cape Coral, a civilian training program. "The state has certain guidelines; I teach them a very specific curriculum," he said.

The elements are similar to other martial arts disciplines, he said, such as karate.

"The morals, character aspects, and fitness aspects are the same," he said. "We deal a lot with 'street clothes' situations." These, he explained, would involve how to fend off an attack-er or mugger by employing mar-tial arts techniques.

An important component of this, Santella said, is the use of environmental weaponry. This, he explained, is identifying and using everything around you as a weapon.

"It could be a table lamp in your bedroom." Santella said. "The average person looks at it as a source of light, but a street defense student would look at that lamp as something they could use for self defense," he said. Such a person could wrap the electrical cord around their attacker's throat and employ strangulation techniques, Santella said.

"It is more of an outlook train-ing that gives you a sense of con-fidence," he continued. "There is a weapon always near you, and the average person thinks of a weapon as a club or a gun. That's how law enforcement needs to think to survive, and I try to pass on that way of thinking."

In receiving his award, Santella was selected from a field of about 10,000 trainers from across the country. A seminar held in Ft. Lauderdale about 6 months ago, augmented by the presentation of training videos Santella had produced, led to his being noticed by folks who later recommended he be selected for top honors. "I was selected someone in Alaska and Washington state recomended me," he said "The information was high-tech. stuff, and they had never seen it presented that way."

Although a member of the Sanibel police force, Santella has trained Cape law enforcement in the martial arts periodically, he said.

Santella is the holder of six different, individual black belts, and has attained the rank of Shihan. "That is a Japanese title that is reserved for heads of

systems." he said.

A newly built location, he said, will be established on Viscaya Parkway sometime next year.

Santella has trained more than 5,000 civilians since 1986, he said.

"The programs are a little different, you would not have hand-cuffing, chemical agents, and liability," he said. "Other than that, the techniques are the same, but the approach is a little different."

Santella also does private, one-on-one training, he said.

"Counter mugging, child anti-abduction, they learn a lot about personal safety." he said.

Class size is limited to about 10 students, he said.

"A lot of schools just I pack them in," Santella said.

Fifteen instructors are on staff, including Santella's wife Leela. Kick-boxing is offered.

"Twelve of our instructors are currently No. 1 on the sports circuit," he said.

For more information about the Street Defense Systems Institute, visit their Web site at [www.streetdefense.com](http://www.streetdefense.com). or call 707-9504.