

# Caution can keep joggers safe

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Wednesday, May 27, 2009

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**CAPITAL REGION** – When a local teacher stood up before a judge earlier this month at the sentencing of one of his attackers, he described what has to be among any jogger’s worst nightmares.

The man was jogging last summer on the trail near Schenectady County Community College when he was attacked by two men. He was stabbed in the shoulder as he sprinted away.

“I still worry about something happening, especially when I hear or feel someone approaching me from behind,” the man told the judge. He asked that his identity not be revealed.

Experts say such attacks are rare. They also shouldn’t be on the list of excuses not to get outdoors, especially with the running season now in full swing.

More prevalent, they say, are accidents and injuries due to carelessness. But with some foresight and attention, the risks of attack or accident can be lowered further.

## Follow your instincts

In the teacher’s case, he told the judge that he spotted a man staring at him intently as he began his walk. He didn’t nod or say anything.

“His presence made me feel uncomfortable, but not enough to stop me from going on my walk,” the teacher said.

Jean Knaack, executive director of the Road Runners Club of America, recommended that runners trust their intuition.

The club, which has several local chapters, distributes a list of safety tips for joggers. Trusting intuition is No. 5 on the list.

“If something doesn’t look right, it probably isn’t,” Knaack said.

“A lot of people get in the mentality ‘I’m going out on a five-mile run and that’s what I’m doing,’” she said. “What we recommend is no run is so important to lose a life.”

The teacher was attacked on his way back, and one of his assailants was the man he spotted early on.

He had stopped at one point near the L&M Motel entrance on Rice Road to take in

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the scene, which included a father and son returning from a bike ride “smiling and giggling as they loaded their bicycles in their truck.”

After the attack, the teacher tried to stop the first bicyclist he saw, but the rider veered around him. He soon flagged down another bicyclist, who assisted him. When he finally got back to his car, he was able to call 911 for help.

Lt. Michael Brown of the Rotterdam Police Department said police believe last summer’s attack was an isolated one. The attackers were quickly caught and later admitted their roles. He couldn’t remember a similar incident on the trails in the town.

### Safety in numbers

Nonetheless, Brown suggested that runners jog during daylight hours and bring a partner and a cellphone.

Patti Clark, a manager at Fleet Feet Sports in Albany, also recommended going out in groups. Even running with a dog can help.

Clark, of Wilton, is more of a walker than a runner these days. About the worst she’s encountered were kids driving by with a squirt gun. (Her husband tracked them down and had a talk with them.)

Still, she keeps her eyes and ears open.

Headsets, she said, can be an enticing way to get through a run, but they also work against being aware of your surroundings.

“Some people need that music to get through a run,” Clark said. “But I’d rather not have that on me and be cautious of what’s around.”

The Road Runners Club also recommends avoiding unpopulated areas, deserted streets or overgrown trails — and the teacher did. The trail by the college was familiar to him as a popular running spot.

Frequent use is one of the strengths of the Canalway Trail system, said Fran Gotcsik, director of programs and policy for Parks & Trails New York.

“What’s nice about the Canalway Trail is there’s always a lot of people on the trail,” Gotcsik said. “That’s one of the best deterrents to crime there is.”

Gotcsik also pointed to standard rules of the trail, where joggers, bikers and others use it simultaneously. Bikers coming up behind a jogger should alert the jogger, she said, and that’s easier to hear without headphones.

### Trail monitors

The Canalway Trail is to soon have even more eyes. Parks & Trails New York last August started a pilot project in Niskayuna to add Canalway Trail Ambassadors.

The volunteers monitor trail conditions, promote safe use of the trail and assist and inform users. They also wear orange vests, providing a safety presence on the trail. The program is run in collaboration with the Canalway Trails Association and the state Canal Corp.

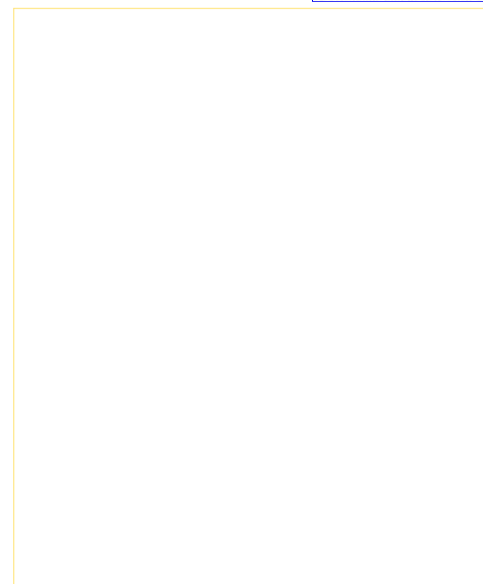
Mike Kelly, president of the Mohawk Hudson Road Runners Club, recommended wearing reflective clothing or blinking lights. Carrying ID is also important in case an accident happens.

The club sponsors several runs, including the Workforce Team Challenge, which was held Thursday in Albany. They don’t allow headphones: “They’re just too

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dangerous.”









Then there’s running with others, in larger groups, single file on roads. Groups, he said, are more visible to drivers and others.

“If you can, run with a group,” said Kelly, of Bethlehem. “For safety reasons and because it’s more fun, frankly.”

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