

fast lane

Park upgraded

➔ Gumnut Park at Cherrybrook has received an upgrade including new play equipment, rubber softfall around play areas and new outdoor gym and exercise equipment for mums and dads. The works were completed by Hornsby Council, which is looking for feedback on its leisure facilities. To contribute to the discussion or find out more visit hornsby.nsw.gov.au.

Rezoning review

➔ Concerned residents gathered at the Galston Community Centre on Sunday to discuss Hornsby Council's review of rural lands. The Sydney Agricultural Rural and Public Lands Trust hosted the meeting in response to a survey by the council about rezoning land at Galston, Glenorie, Dural and Arcadia. Homes in the areas were letterboxed the Hornsby Council Rural Rezoning Survey recently which asked residents to respond to a number of rezoning possibilities.

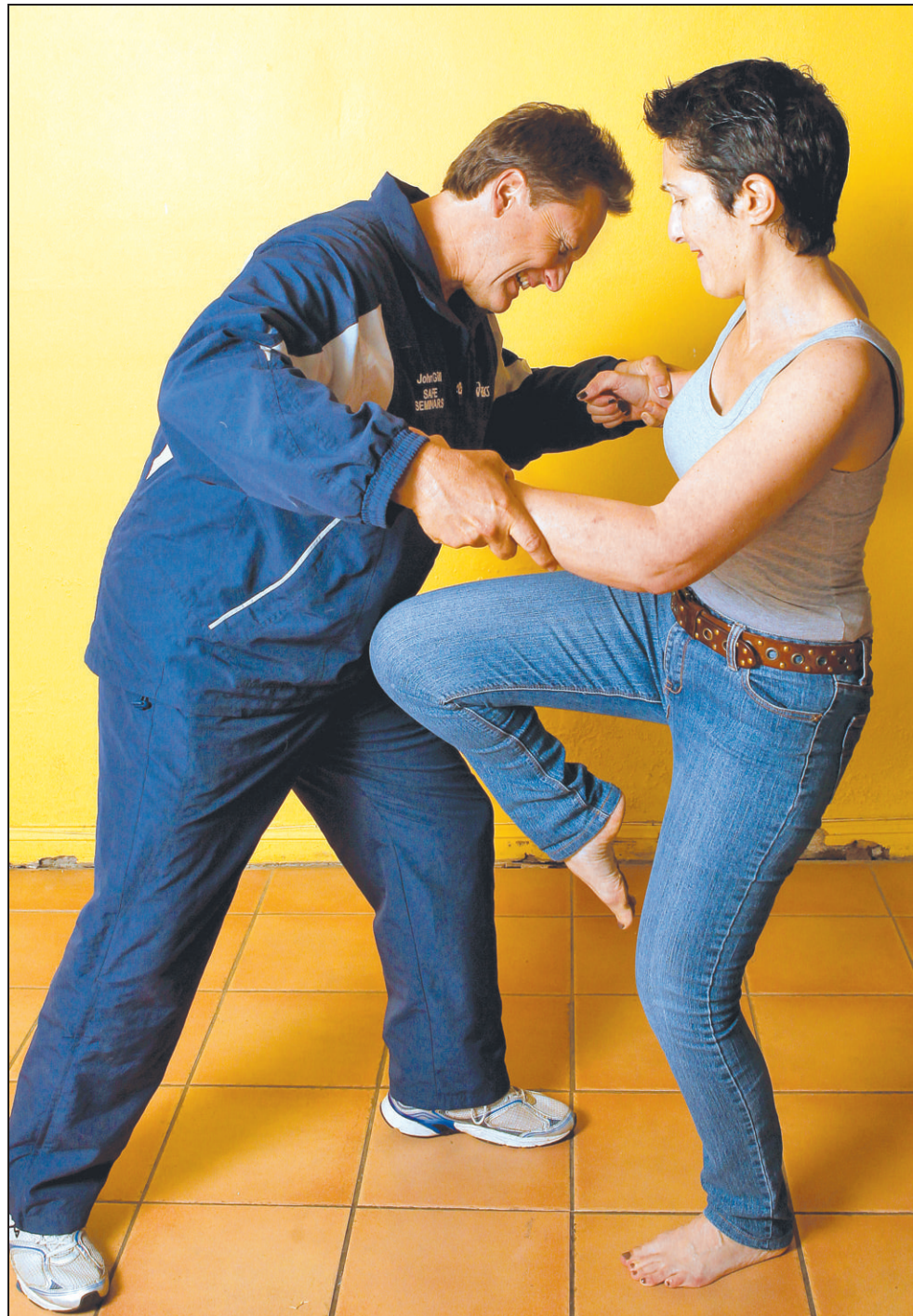
Photo contest

➔ Budding photographers have until Monday to enter their best snaps of Ku-ring-gai for a chance to win. The Capture Ku-ring-gai photo competition, run by Ku-ring-gai Council, is accepting entries until September 1. Visit kmc.nsw.gov.au/capture for more information.

Free seminar

➔ Questions about downsizing from a larger to a smaller property will be answered at a free retirement living seminar to be held over two sessions at Pennant Hills Bowling Club on Tuesday, September 16. For information and to book, contact john@allenandsherpard.com.au or call John Gill on 0490 189 891.

THORNLEIGH



John Gill, with Angela Panzarino, wants every woman and child taught self-defence.

Teaching tools to save women's lives

WHAT if every woman and child in Australia received free self-defence classes?

That's the hope for 11-time world self-defence champion and Thornleigh resident John Gill, a man who knows the benefits of arming young women with the tools to defend themselves.

"I trained a 13-year-old girl who was later grabbed, dragged into a toilet block and gagged," Mr Gill said.

"She knew what to do and managed to escape."

The 52-year-old has written to Prime Minister Tony Abbott requesting the Federal Government fund a national self-defence program – estimated to cost upwards of \$5 million.

He said Australia has the world's third-highest rate per capita for rape and male violence claims at least one woman's life every week.

Mr Gill is holding free self-defence workshops for women, children, families and the elderly at Thornleigh Squash and Fitness Centre on September 4.

Classes are from 1.30-2.30pm for seniors, 5-6pm for children and parents and 7-8pm for women and families.

For more information, visit selfdefenceaustralia.com.au.

STATEWIDE

Forced mergers are on agenda

GOVERNMENT HAS 'ONE SHOT'

Adam Bell

THE State Government has given the strongest indication yet that some councils will need to be pushed if they refuse to amalgamate.

While stopping short of scrapping its long-held policy of "no forced mergers", the Government signalled last week it was preparing to announce the biggest shake-up of local government in NSW in more than a decade.

The reforms will be outlined in its long-awaited response to an independent review that recommended a host of council mergers affecting at least 33 of the 41 councils in Sydney.

Hornsby Council has backed merger proposals with neighbouring councils, a move fiercely opposed by Ku-ring-gai Council.

In an interview with NewsLocal, Local Government Minister Paul Toole warned the Government had "one shot" to get the reforms right and he will not "just leave it to local government on its own".

"All recommendations are being looked at and all recommendations will be responded to in the very near future," he said. "We want to get it right ... we have one shot to start to improve local government in NSW ... But coming out of local government myself, I don't want to see that we just

leave it to local government on its own. We have to work together, the NSW State Government and local councils, to improve the sector."

While forced mergers are unlikely, NewsLocal understands the reforms will hinge on a host of financial incentives and other forms to support councils.

"We are not going to do what the Labor Party did and leave them hanging," Mr Toole said. "We need to look at ways of supporting those councils who want to do voluntary mergers."

He also signalled the mergers may include some groupings of councils not flagged in the Review Panel's report released in January.

"I have to say that as the Minister I am very open minded ... there are various mergers that are being discussed that aren't a part of that report ... we shouldn't take these off the table."

Opposition spokeswoman for Local Government Sophie Cotsis said Labor did not support forced mergers.

"We support councils working together to deliver services but not changes that ... cause job losses or cut local services," she said.

Should councils merge? Tell us on Facebook.



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