

Martial arts kick-start kids' confidence

BY KATHLEEN O'DONOHUE
SPECIAL WRITER

Every kid meets up with one sooner or later: the schoolyard bully. It's important he know what to do in this situation when walking away or imploring him to stop simply doesn't work.

Some Farmington area parents believe they've found an answer: Bolstering their children's self confidence and defense skills by enrolling in Choi Kwang Do, a Korean form of martial arts.

At first glance, it appears the 18 kids in Jeff and Connie Duncan's Farmington Hills Choi Kwang Do school, "Do Jang" to be more precise, are merely tossing beach balls around and having fun.

But there's more going on here. In the form of a game, the kids find it's not only fun but beneficial; while they're required to perform their belt pattern when the ball is caught, they're learning cooperation and respect while improving speed and agility.

After this initial exercise, the kids are lined up according to rank (white belt is a beginner; black belt the highest level) and perform their routines. It's refreshing to hear "yes sir" and "yes ma'am" depending on who is teaching them. Higher ranked students often help new members learn their moves.

Fighting friends

As a group, the kids seem genuinely fond of each other, and parents socialize while kids practice. The camaraderie here is palpable; more than just waiting for kids to finish, parents relate to each other in more of extended family type atmosphere.

When a young student was having difficulty breaking a board, all the students and parents rallied with shouts of "pil sung," Korean for certain victory. As she broke the board, she was met with thunderous applause, a definite self esteem booster.

Martial arts training is often controversial. Critics contend students are being taught violence.

"Not at all," says Jeff Duncan. "If anything, we teach them to have the self confidence to be able to take care of themselves in a threatening situation. We tell them first to use their intelligence, then walk away. We don't advocate violence. A student is required to talk to me personally if he feels the need to use Choi Kwang Do."

Only one child was expelled in the last six years.

Budokan is a Farmington school for karate as well as jujitsu. Karate is stand up fighting while jujitsu is a form of ground fighting, a grappling system whereby the individuals engage in throws, chokes and joint locks.

"It helps with focus and concentration in school and parents find that grades improve," said Karen Potochick, manager. "Karate is as good as the teacher. One must understand the child's personality to teach effectively. The primary goal is to boost self esteem. The training helps tremendously with self confidence, public speaking."

Many parents echo the positive effects of martial arts training on their children's learning. A mother of two children with attention deficit disorder relates

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Katherine Okla
—child therapist

that the training at Choi Kwang Do has greatly impacted her boys ability to focus and concentrate. Others consider the martial art a perfect activity for the child who is noncompetitive. The results, they say, cross over into many daily activities, including school performance. Though some parents think the exercise tires out the hyperactive child, in fact the prime benefit is the class teaches the individual greater self control.

Paradox perhaps, but . . .

"It may seem paradoxical to enroll a child with aggressive tendencies in martial arts," says Katherine Okla, a child therapist in Farmington Hills who has a doctorate. "Yet the training helps tremendously with impulse control and gives the child self confidence and the ability to feel positive about himself."

Okla frequently recommends martial arts to clients.

Albert Betzler, manager of Aikido International Tenchi Chin of Farmington Hills describes his system as more similar to jujitsu than karate.

"One uses the momentum of the attacker to bring them under control, then employs joint locks, pulls and throws."

He states that his instruction teaches children cooperation with others and cites a long term advantage; "as they mature, they are more apt to work together with others."

He has turned away some adult students who were pursuing instruction for the wrong reasons.

"One learns to work out disagreements by talking as opposed to physical aggression."

The cost of self defense classes are not more than other sports. In addition to the cost of the class, other expenditures include belt rank testing fees, safety equipment such as hand and foot pads, and larger uniforms as a child grows.

Not pricey

"It's not more expensive than other sports when the cost is averaged over the time one participates," says Duncan, of Choi Kwang Do. "It's probably one of the more economical."

All three schools allow students to take a class on a trial basis. Both Budokan and Tenchi Chin charge on a monthly basis thereafter.

At Choi Kwang Do, for \$99, a student receives a uniform with white belt and unlimited training lessons for a two month peri-



Foot forward: Brown belt student Stephanie Westcott completes her kicks and maneuver at Choi Kwang Do school in Farmington Hills. Children learn kicks and confidence that leads to better impulse control.

No false hopes

"We don't try to give anyone false hopes," says Jeff Duncan, a third-degree black belt.

"Bigger is always better. (That doesn't mean) a smaller person can't have an impact in a fight. We do a lot of work with kids, telling them their voice is their best weapon."

Indeed, the kids here, who range in age from five years to teenagers, seem uninhibited when performing their drills and shouting the "Ki Hap," the characteristic yell in martial arts which brings to the forefront one's mental and physical strength.

"The kids love it," Cassar continues. "The Duncans are wonderful. (They) go over the lesson till you get it and never make the kids feel bad."

Her oldest daughter, Lauren, is a first-degree black belt; son Sean, a black belt. Cassar recently enrolled in the adult class.

"I've watched for three years and decided I wanted the physical exercise for myself as well as the self defense. It really gets

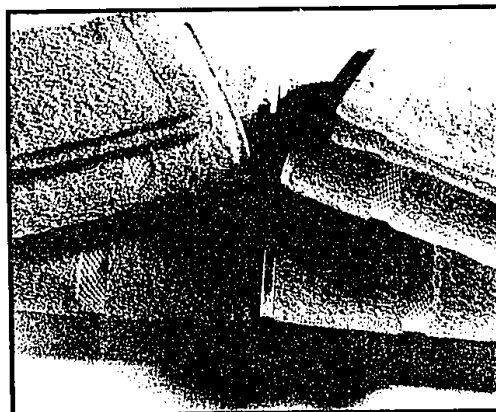
you motivated."

Connie Duncan, a second-degree black belt, gives instruction in Korean. In a Meijer store parking lot a few years back, Duncan made use of her skills when a man attempted to assault her.

In addition to self defense, she said, "the advantages of Choi Kwang Do are many. It helps children with discipline, self control, confidence and other things most parents would love to see. Adults benefit by achieving a healthier lifestyle through cardiovascular training and a renewed confidence to be able to help themselves."



Knows the moves: Connie Duncan leads a class at Orchard Lake and 10 Mile in drills.



Manners matter:
Danny Izzaj from Farmington Hills and a green belt, punches a bag held by "Mr." Pat Gavin. The instructors all go by "Mr." or "Mrs." (part of the Korean formality).



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