

KARATE

Much more than learning to fight or break bricks

By Lorraine McClish staff writer

To those who think of karate as men flying through the air, beating people up and breaking bricks, Ben Creech answers, "Learning how to fight is the last reason people come to my classes."

The Farmington Hills resident who travels the metropolitan area to teach the ancient Oriental art said, "It is a therapeutic experience made up of 4,000 years of physical and mental health."

"All of the external vital points that are stimulated to make various parts of the body function in acupuncture are stimulated in the karate exercises that in turn benefit the internal."

Creech began his career as a history teacher in Dearborn Public Schools. He moved from there to teach music in

Livonia Public Schools and is now devoting full time to teaching karate and his own devised class called "Synchronistics."

He designed Synchronistics in large part because of the stereotyped image of fighting most people hold of karate. Synchronistics includes all the beneficial effects of karate training.

SYNCHRONISTICS has just gotten under way this fall in classes sponsored by Farmington YMCA, Livonia Community Schools, and in several condominium clubhouses.

Meanwhile, Creech continues to teach karate as a credit course at Wayne State University, in various adult education departments and in senior citizen centers.

In The Gathering Place, Creech pointed to several of his senior adult

students who wear colored belts leading up the ladder to the pinnacle of the black belt.

"Age is not a barrier to developing self-control," he said. "Neither is being out of shape or being uncoordinated. Most of these students have never done anything athletic in their lives."

The self-control Creech speaks of comes from a systematic technique which develops both mental and physical control.

"We learn to live in the here and now so the energy isn't drained off. It's a matter of clearing or emptying the mind for concentration, working with the energy around us so we are not stiff and helpless," he said.

The training makes for a sense of timing so students react smoothly to any situation, physical or mental. Attacks, whether verbal or emotional, can be more easily withstood.

AS SIX, EIGHT, or 10-week sessions of karate come to a close in his various teaching spots, Creech said he has some students, "who follow me around not wanting to break their stride."

"Once they get into this they realize that they're building a confidence in just living; building their control and stability and don't want to lose ground in any area," he said.

As Creech lists fighting as the last reason for students to come to his class, he lists the best reasons as learning balance, coordination, speed, endurance and flexibility.

"There is no competition in this," he said. "We're not competing with anybody. We're bringing ourselves up to the maximum of our potential. And this is not a macho thing. It is for all ages, and most of the classes are co-ed. We work to do the best in whatever situation we're in."

Creech has worked with several persons away from their work because of a physical disability and said he has seen "remarkable results from karate's rehabilitative value, both physical and psychological."

In capsule form he sums up karate's benefits by saying, "What the mind learns it can forget. What the body learns it never forgets. What the cells know reinforce what the mind knows."

Ben Creech retired from his job as a history teacher in Livonia Public Schools to devote full time to teaching karate. The physical control and stability learned from the ancient Oriental art is carried over into one's emotional life, he says, which makes it beneficial for those of all ages.



Stella Murphy is the star of The Gathering Place's karate show that takes place early every Monday morning before regular activities for senior adults open for the day. She is the first member of the class to earn the karate blue belt.



Staff photos by Randy Borst



Though most of Creech's classes are co-ed, the early-morning sessions in the Gathering Place are composed of all women. Going through their karate paces are (at left from top clockwise) Helen Fass, Beatrice Bechtel, Billie Hasty and Stella Murphy. Above, Fass, who wears a yellow belt, follows instructions for proper hand movements.



Balance, coordination, speed, endurance and flexibility are the benefits derived by students of karate. Ben Creech's students here are Stella Murphy (at left) and Beatrice Bechtel.