

## **Inspirational Martial Arts Stories 2007-1**

From: [www.your-martial-arts-resources.com](http://www.your-martial-arts-resources.com)

### **Amputee back on patrol as police officer:**

From:

<http://news.kypost.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070102/NEWS02/701020355/1014/NEWS02>  
(January 2, 2007):

Louisville -- After more than two years and 33 surgeries, one thing became clear to Kevin Trees - perhaps his only chance to regain his active lifestyle and return to being a police officer was to have his leg amputated.

So, on Oct. 3, 2005, Trees underwent his 34th surgery, losing his right leg above the knee.

But thanks to a high-tech titanium prosthesis, his determination and support of friends and family, Trees has returned to the force - having recovered enough from the off-duty April 2003 motorcycle crash that nearly killed him.

Police "see every day about death, and I was so close to dying," said Trees, 37. "It's changed my whole entire life. It's changed my entire outlook and appreciation of everything."

In April, Trees was reinstated as a Louisville officer and joined the air unit. He'd previously worked as a patrol officer. In 2003, he was given the former city department's police officer of the year award. Now he is training to get his helicopter pilot's license - a dream he's had since he was growing up in Pensacola, Fla.

Trees describes returning to work as a hurdle in his recovery, not the completion of his goal. He credits doctors who wouldn't give up on him, a supportive wife and children, co-workers who believed in him, and his own drive.

"I tried to be a real good officer," he said. "I tried to be a real good person. And I think people recognized that."

Trees remembers everything about the accident except the impact. He remembers hitting a bad patch of road and then fighting to regain control of his motorcycle. What he doesn't remember is slamming into a tree in a yard. His next memory is of lying on the ground, hearing birds chirp while feeling the wind blow and blood seep out of him. "It was pretty surreal."

He knew he was in trouble. When he got to the emergency room, doctors had to give him six units of blood. His right femur was shoved through his pelvis. His right knee was shattered into 30 pieces. His right forearm was broken in three places and his right hand in eight places. His helmet prevented head injuries.

He spent the next eight weeks in intensive care and underwent 16 surgeries, slipping into a coma after one. He remembers "excruciating pain," he said.

He then went to a nursing home and eventually to Frazier Rehab Institute. For the next two years, Trees said, he struggled with pain, self-pity and his inability to be as active as he was when he'd been a body builder and a member of the police dive team. "He would get so frustrated about not being able to do something," recalled his wife, Christie.

He also struggled to save his leg, but eventually realized he would have to resort to the amputation. "After laying up for two years and watching lawyer commercials and daytime television, it was time to move on with life."

He got busy researching his options and met with Matthew Hayden, owner of Kentucky Prosthetics and Orthotics Inc., to discuss prosthetic options. Hayden suggested Trees consider the C-Leg, which uses a computer to define knee movements.

"One of my commitments to him was to have him doing 95 percent of what he was able to do prior to his injury," Hayden said.

The C-Leg has been on the market for years but has become more popular as the technology continued to improve. The key to the C-Leg is that the computer system inside the knee reads data from the user 50 times per second, allowing the leg to make micro adjustments based on gait, stride speed and terrain.

Once he had his prosthesis, he started to practice all types of movements, and falling became a common occurrence.

Then in February, he started taking some martial arts classes with now-retired Maj. Bill Weedman. Trees credits those classes with making the difference in his physical recovery.

Eventually, Trees said, his strength and confidence returned. He's now able to run on a treadmill, work on martial arts and do many of the things he did before.

"It's easy for me to forget sometimes because he's gotten so much back to normal," his wife said.

By last April, Trees was making an effort to get reinstated by the police department. "For me that was a starting point. I felt I had more to prove to everybody."

And friends and co-workers say he has returned as strong and dedicated to police work as ever.

"It was all taken away from him," said Det. Kevin Wheatley, a friend. "He never lost sight of his goals. He never quit."

### **Don't mess with these karate 'kids':**

From:

<http://www.argusleader.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070108/LIFE/701080311>  
(January 8, 2007):

Hartford - On Friday mornings at the Senior Center, three women punch the air with high blocks, knife-hand moves and the deft movements of karate.

For almost five years, Alice Melin, Bernice Rubach and Jean Kroeger have followed their sensei, or instructor, Arnie Lusch, through the katas, a regimented series of moves.

The three women, who all celebrated their 70th birthdays some time ago, have achieved brown-belt status working with Lusch.

"We have fun doing it, and we laugh a lot during the session," says Kroeger, 72, of Hartford. "We don't do much sparring, and we don't have any actual confrontations, but it's a good way to stay active and to stay sharp."

Staying sharp physically and mentally is important for older folks, says Jenny Centra, a program assistant at the Center for Active Generations in Sioux Falls. A social component to exercise is a bonus, too, she says.

Melin says she gets confidence from her training, which fits under the auspices of the American Shotokan Karate Federation. Lusch is a fourth-degree black belt.

"It's another aspect of taking care of yourself, both physically, with the movement, and mentally, by learning the katas and discipline," says Melin, 73. "When we first saw the class and what they do, we were shocked."

But Lusch tailors this Friday morning session to his students. There's no board-breaking, Hollywood-style karate here. Instead, the key is learning defense against any attacker, Lusch says.

"These ladies would surprise you with what they can do," says Lusch, 68, of Hartford. "They can use the techniques to 100 percent of their ability. And they very seldom miss a class."

Rubach, 83, says the class started with 12 students, but that the three who have stuck with it have teamwork to thank for their success.

"We work together, and we are older, so we can't do all the stuff like the high jumping kicks," she says. "We're all the same degree, so it's not a competitive thing. I just look forward to Friday mornings."

Rubach says her practice has led to a growing interest in karate. She watches some competitions on television, and she enjoys reading more about this ancient form of combat. "It's also helped keep me limber," she says. "It's a lot to remember, but it keeps my mind going, and Arnie is so pleasant."

Centra, who leads fitness classes at the Center for Active generations, says this trio of martial artists shows that lifelong learning and activity can be beneficial.

"Tai chi is a popular class at the center," she says. "Through the movements, people work their mind, body and spirit. It helps to keep the mind active, and people feel better."

As is the case with the karate women of Hartford, who have become better friends over their years of martial arts training, Centra says the social aspect of group exercise makes a big difference.

"They come in and exercise, then have coffee together," she says. "It's a way to make friends and to have that reason to get out of the house, off the couch."

For Lusch, karate was a way to disprove doubters, which he has done since birth, when his parent were told a deformity in his feet would prevent him from walking.

"I started karate when I was 48, even though friends thought I was too old to do so," he says. "I started teaching three years later, and I earned my black belt in 1991."

Lusch, along with his students, seeks to avoid conflicts, but he says the training provides defensive instincts in the face of something bad happening.

"It's rewarding as I learn from my students," he says. "And they keep coming back, so we'll keep working on things together."

The class continues on Fridays and has an open invitation to newcomers. "There's only one rule: senior ladies only, for this class," Lusch says.

### **Toby's incredible story:**

From: <http://www.siskiyoudaily.com/articles/2007/01/19/sports/doc45b1388cecbd8727527506.txt> (January 19, 2007):

It began on the advice of his doctor. Toby McGilvary, age 4, was born with Cerebral Palsy. The debilitating disease made most normal physical activity almost impossible. His legs were crippled, his speech slurred and his balance and coordination precarious at best. His doctor recommended to his mother, Connie, that he enroll in a martial arts program to help with his physical therapy.

Toby enrolled in the Yreka Martial Arts Academy and began working with an instructor. Toby found it almost impossible to stay up in class. The pain in his legs was constant, but it did not deter him from his twice-a-week classes. Toby found something he loved.

Beginning class in 1998, Toby progressed slowly. The normal amount of time to get through the program was three years. After seven, Toby was still working toward his goal: a Black Belt. His instructor warned Toby that he would not be given any special treatment. No breaks, and Toby never asked for any.

But there was a quiet determination in Toby that earned him the respect of his peers. He was voted "most inspirational student" three years in a row – the most of any student in the academy's 17-year history.

In 2002, Toby asked if he could join the Yreka Karate Team, which would mean two more classes a week. Given permission, Toby threw himself into the training, which included Saturdays at the Yreka High track, running sprints and climbing hills. Even

though he was always last, he never gave up.

By year's end, Toby was given his team uniform.

Toby's instructor created a Competition Form that he would have to memorize and perform perfectly before he could travel with the team. Sometimes breaking down in tears when the pain was too much, Toby would stop and rest, and then start again.

In 2006, Toby petitioned the Academy to allow him to take his Black Belt exams. After eight years of study — more than twice as long as anyone else — he was accepted. On his application, Toby listed his qualifications: Three-time GSKA world champion; three-time national champion; two-time Long Beach Internationals champion; winner of 17 national tournaments. Now 12, Toby was ready to finish his dream.

The Black Belt exams lasted two weeks. He ran, fought, wrestled, threw and committed to memory over 200 different techniques that he would have to perform.

Prior to his exams, Toby learned that his grandmother had cancer. But Toby was used to adversity. His discipline and focus was almost supernatural. He never wavered, never gave up, never asked for anything but to be like other children.

But Toby McGilvary is not like other children. At 12, he is a national and international champion in Sport Karate. Recently, he became the 41st Black Belt to graduate from the Academy. His grandmother and the rest of his family were there that special day. Seventeen years of Black Belts lined up to salute him as he took the Black Belt Oath: to help others in distress; to spurn pride and accept humility; to treat all with respect no matter their station in life.

Toby's instructor gave him a sword that special day with an inscription along the blade: "To the one I most admire."

Now, he was one of them.

### **A rare achievement:**

From: [http://www.vagazette.com/sports/va-sports4\\_012007jan20,0,2802987.story](http://www.vagazette.com/sports/va-sports4_012007jan20,0,2802987.story)  
(January 20, 2007):

What started as a mere athletic activity to stay in shape for a man nearing his 60s has evolved into a rare feat.

Guy DeWolf, the 75-year-old owner of Williamsburg Coin & Stamp, last week became likely the oldest person in the state to practice the martial art of Aikido.

Eleven years ago, DeWolf earned a black belt in Aikido at the Peninsula Ki Aikido Club in Yorktown.

However, during the last five years, he has battled through crippling arthritis that has kept him off the mat with regularity. Just three months ago, DeWolf had both of his hips replaced and was unable to walk.

But after a month-long recovery process, he was able to continue his passion and participate in a two-hour Aikido class at the Gloucester Rec Center last Tuesday.

The two-hour training session meets twice a week with participants ranging in age from 16 to 40.

Time has elapsed, but DeWolf hasn't lost his sense of humor regarding his return to the Japanese martial art.

"I'd like to be a point guard for William and Mary if I had my choice of sport, but I'm happy just be able to walk and get back on the mat," DeWolf said with a bright smile.

"I'm a little rusty, but at 75, it's pretty exciting to just be out there with these young guys."

Aikido is the same martial arts form used and taught by actor Steven Segal, DeWolf noted.

The art consists of striking, body throw and joint-locking techniques, and is known for its fluidity and blending with an attacker, rather than meeting force with force.

### **Disabled boy climbs 83 flights for fundraiser:**

From: <http://www.nbc5.com/news/10868505/detail.html>  
(January 29, 2007):

Michael McCarthy was born with a severe birth defect in his legs that left him unable to walk.

When a Chicago family adopted him from a Russian children's home at age 4, Michael's only way to get around was to scoot on his hands.

After undergoing surgery at Children's Memorial Hospital and being fitted with two above-the-knee prostheses, Michael slowly taught himself to walk, first with a walker, then with crutches.

Michael, now 10, faced a tough new challenge Sunday. He was picked to lead off 2,400 people who climbed the 83-story Aon Center in a Children's Memorial fundraiser expected to raise \$350,000.

Michael barely acknowledges his disability. He recently taught himself to skateboard on crutches.

"He fell and fell until he could do it," said his mother, Julie McCarthy. "He always does things the hard way. If there are stairs, he climbs them, rather than go up the ramp."

Michael also has learned karate. His coach, Jeff Kohn, said that in his 30 years of teaching, Michael is "far and away the most extraordinarily courageous kid. He raises the level of everyone's expectations."

Michael does chin-ups, pull-ups, sit-ups and other exercises to build upper-body strength. He spent about six weeks training for the climb.

The Aon Center, 200 E. Randolph, is 1,136 feet tall. It's Chicago's second-tallest building after the Sears Tower.

Michael couldn't climb with his legs. So he would put one arm on the railing and one arm on a crutch and lift himself up, one step at a time. His goal was 500 steps.

"He was not going to just show up for an honorary event," said his father, Dave McCarthy. "He would put his whole heart and soul into it."

Kohn served as Michael's spotter, and his mother carried his water. Michael wouldn't stop to catch his breath or even drink water.

"He has the will of a lion," Kohn said.

After 30 minutes, Michael had made it up 22 stories and 520 steps.

He was getting so fatigued and red in the face that Kohn and his mother finally made him stop.

"I wanted to keep going," Michael said. "Next time I come, I'm going to do 600 steps."

The fastest climber was Jesse Berg, 34, of Chicago, who climbed the 1,616 steps in 10 minutes, 16 seconds. The fastest female was Kathryn Froehlich, 44, of Northbrook, at 11 minutes, 46 seconds.

### **Harbor man gets a kick out of his sport:**

From: [http://www.petoskeynews.com/articles/2007/01/29/news/local\\_regional/news2.txt](http://www.petoskeynews.com/articles/2007/01/29/news/local_regional/news2.txt)  
(January 29, 2007):

Pride seems to radiate off 33-year-old Craig Hafner of Harbor Springs as he stands, dressed in white, carefully tying on his black belt. A smile spreads across his face as he makes sure the belt is tied correctly.

Although it's just another Friday night practice at the American Taekwondo Association Black Belt Academy, Hafner takes extra care with his new black belt, inscribed with his name and the word "persistence." After all, it took Hafner, who was born with Down's Syndrome, five years to earn the top level tae kwon do belt.

"That's a lot of dedication and persistence on his part," his mother, Rosalie Hafner said. "So it never bothered (his instructor or myself) how long it took him as long as he got there. I think it's a great accomplishment. You see a lot of self-confidence."

The amount of time it took Hafner to achieve his goal didn't phase him either. Just talking about receiving his black belt puts a huge smile on his face. And while at practice, Hafner wears a look of pure joy as he spars with fellow classmates and his tae kwon do instructor Tinh Nguyen, a third degree black belt.

“It’s not that hard,” Hafner said of learning tae kwon do. “It’s powerful.” Tae kwon do makes him feel powerful, he explained.

Hafner began taking tae kwon do lessons about five years ago, participating in classes both at the Harbor Springs studio and in Florida. Rosalie, his mother, thought it would be a good activity for him, a way to keep him active as he got older.

“I had no idea how far he would go. He had more of a goal in mind than I did,” she said with a laugh while Hafner stood smiling next to her, nodding in agreement.

Ever since Hafner began tae kwon do lessons he has been working really hard to accomplish his black belt goal.

“For four and a half years I never heard him talk about anything,” Nguyen said. That was until the day Hafner tested for his black belt. Then he couldn’t stop talking. “He said what makes him feel good, what keeps him going is tae kwon do.”

Nguyen said he has been proud to have Hafner as a student. His studio is open to all students, including those with disabilities or special needs like Hafner.

“Everyone is a challenge, but it’s a fun job. You just have to be patient with everyone. Not everyone is in the same condition,” he said.

For Hafner, Nguyen said he often went slower, taking more time for him to learn moves before testing him to the next level — there are nine belts in tae kwon do, signifying the different levels, before a student begins training for black belt, which also has nine levels.

“For him, I want him to feel comfortable,” Nguyen said. “All I do is encourage him.”

One way that helped Hafner, who struggles with reading, were supplemental instructional videos that allowed him to practice at home. This helped him build upon the regular training at the school, building his proficiency each belt requires. The first belt, the white belt required Hafner to know 18 tae kwon do moves. To earn his black belt, Hafner had to demonstrate more than 80 moves to a panel of judges.

Then there is the weekly sparring with fellow classmates. Hafner said he is thankful to his fellow students for helping him improve his tae kwon do. He enjoys giving that help in return.

But his favorite thing to do is spar with his instructor.

“Craig likes to spar with me because I leave a big space open so he can kick me,” Nguyen said. “He likes that.”

As for his training, Hafner plans to keep on going. He is already working toward his second degree black belt. Like his belt reads, the man’s got “persistence.”

**Young man uses karate to battle disability:**

From: <http://ems.gmnews.com/news/2007/0131/Sports/015.html>  
(January 30, 2007):

They call him the mayor of Metuchen High.

Wesley Brooks, a gregarious 15-year-old sophomore, is a student assistant for the Metuchen High School football team, an honor student and former equestrian enthusiast.

He is no stranger to the limelight, recently giving a stirring speech at a Metuchen High pep rally, and for the last two and a half years he has grown fond of karate. Wesley Brooks has cerebral palsy, and a mean high kick.

Wesley was born three months premature on the way to the hospital. Weighing in at less than a pound, doctors gave Wesley a 75 percent chance of survival.

"He's overcome a great deal of odds," his mother, Christine Brooks, said.

He has a condition known as retinopathy, where his retina is dangerously close to detachment. Because of this and his cerebral palsy, Wesley was unable to participate in any contact sports in school.

When his younger brother began to take karate lessons in the summer of 2004, Wesley thought it an opportunity to conquer yet another adversity.

"I really didn't know what to expect," Wesley said when he began taking lessons at the Black Belt Institute. "I thought, 'Everybody is kicking average - uh, oh.'"

But Wesley persevered. After learning the basics, thanks to the help of Master Robert Matland and the staff of the Black Belt Institute, Wesley has progressed to the level of red belt and his kicking ability, which was almost non-existent when he started, has greatly improved.

Wesley sees the difference in himself.

"I feel a lot more confident," Wesley said. "I can manage a lot better."

Seven years ago, Wesley had to relearn how to walk after a radical surgery to correct his legs. Before the surgery, his knees curved in and nearly touched one another. The surgery required the breaking and resetting of his legs. Within three months of physical therapy, Wesley wowed doctors by being able to use his crutches.

These hardships have instilled in Wesley a desire for advocacy, speaking up for himself and others like him.

That is why Wesley mentors other students with disabilities and helps them cope with the hardships that Wesley has already overcome.

He recently took a second-grader with cerebral palsy through a tour of his former school to show the student how to get around and learn how to manage for herself.

"He was like that from a little kid," his mom said, "speaking up for himself. If you don't speak up for yourself, you're not gonna get it."

Wesley said that helping others be independent and an advocate for themselves has had an effect on him.

"I feel good about it because it might limit some of what their anxieties are, so they are prepared for what might come," Wesley said.

Wesley's mind-set has not gone unnoticed by the people around him.

When Metuchen High School football coach Bob Olmer approached Wesley to come help with the team, he did not know what to expect. He had to learn the ins and outs of the game, and be able to help the team during practice and games.

Wesley began motivational speaking during practices, helping the team to what is arguably their best season yet, finishing 8-2 and making it to the second round of the Central Jersey Group II tournament - further than any Metuchen team in history.

Wesley's room is swathed in "Star Wars" posters and photos of himself riding horses and delivering the weather each morning over the PA in his former middle school. Among the items neatly placed on a book shelf are tokens of his accomplishments - two of which he holds in high regard.

Wesley was recognized by radio station Magic 98.3 as part of its annual "Kids Who Make Magic" program. Matland nominated him for his determination in karate and Wesley was chosen out of hundreds of entries to be one of only 20 kids recognized at a dinner in their honor.

Brooks said Wesley did not even know he was nominated and on the night of the event he was beaming.

Also in his room, tucked away in a photo album, is a photo of himself and another young girl with a disability. The girl had left school because she was being teased, Wesley said, but due to a chance encounter with Wesley and some words of encouragement, she came back to the school.

Wesley's desire to help and advocate for people like himself is best exemplified in his other treasured award, the Helping Hand Award he received from the football team - a statue of one man, with outstretched hands, lifting another off the ground.

### **Mirrored movement:**

From: <http://www.lakesunleader.com/articles/2007/02/02/news/01.txt>  
(February 1, 2007):

Lake Ozark, Missouri -- Judging by the effortless way he goes through each motion and by the smile on his face, he's done this routine a million times before.

The verbal and physical limitations that beset an autistic child do not keep 14-year-old Kyle Swofford from hitting the mat twice a week with Suzie Franz, his 17-year-old Tae kwon do teacher.

Earning a first-degree black belt in the special needs division was something few people had faith he could do. But determination kicked in and the School of the Osage High School junior continued to push him with each lesson.

Three years ago, Swofford would watch his younger brothers from the sidelines as they took classes at Howard's ATA Black Belt Academy in Osage Beach. Eventually an instructor approached his mom about allowing Kyle to participate.

The distraction of a crowd made it easy for Swofford to lose focus, so plans were made to train him one-on-one.

'The first time I was with Kyle and started teaching him, I didn't know what to do,' Franz said. 'But Kyle and I grew. We learned how to cope with each other. We had a lot of difficulties in the beginning, especially because I didn't know how to deal with a child that has autism.'

In addition to working with a special-needs child, Franz had to modify her teaching style during a time when she was still learning the technique. As a second-degree black belt, Swofford has been doing Tae kwon do with her family for about five years.

'I have had to modify every form to consistently mirror him. I have to do all the forms opposite of him,' she said.

It took time for Swofford to catch on to form, sparring and weapons, but with practice and his curiosity, Franz says he kept coming back. Through the years, they traveled to competitions together, cheering each other on during tests.

Working with Kyle has been a life-changing experience, she said.

'He has made me more optimistic. I feel the need to be more open and positive,'

Franz said. 'I have learned more about myself in the fact that anything is possible. I have learned how to care for someone else besides myself and I have also learned how to be a better martial arts instructor.'

Family members say Swofford has become more verbal, focused and agile.

'I don't plan on stopping teaching Kyle. I plan on teaching martial arts as my career. When I open my studio, I would like to have a class set aside for people that need that one-on-one time,' Franz said.

As an instructor herself, Belinda Franz has been watching her daughter take on a change of her own. When asked what the most noticeable difference has been in Suzie, she said it was her daughter's patience.

'At first she wasn't very confident with the challenge. She has learned as much with him as he has from her. Now when she gets a challenge, she is not afraid to chance it. I am very proud of her,' Belinda said.

## **Determined to overcome:**

From: <http://lfpres.ca/newsstand/CityandRegion/2007/02/03/3514788-sun.html>  
(February 3, 2007):

Dressed in uniform, brown belt tied at her waist, Trish Thyret stands with knees bent, hands raised and determination in her eyes.

In the dojo, the martial arts studio, Thyret throws her left arm downward for a kick block, then brings it back up for a punch block before delivering a punch of her own.

Thyret, 37, is mentally challenged, borderline obsessive compulsive with some and has borderline manic depression.

And she is focused on replacing her brown belt with black at graduation this summer.

"Trish really does demonstrate the true meaning of perseverance," said instructor Steve Stewart. "She never gave up."

Stewart's Modern Martial Arts and Family Fitness Centre on Glenora Drive offers a modified American kenpo program, similar to karate, for people with various disabilities. Thyret isn't able to use weapons or perform some locks because of arthritis.

Her modified black belt designation is suited for her.

"It's rare. A lot of schools are very traditional," said the centre's Melanie Stewart. "But everyone is here for their own reasons."

It usually takes three to four years to earn a standard black belt.

The graduation ceremony marks the end of a journey for Thyret that started 10 years ago, from a desire to protect herself against those taking advantage of her shortcomings.

"It's good for females like me who need to defend themselves," Thyret said.

Doctor's didn't understand the full extent of her disabilities until seven years ago, said her mother Karen. Only then was Trish Thyret prescribed medication.

Before treatment, she lived with a boyfriend in a decrepit building -- since boarded up -- in London's east end.

Thyret was robbed and abused.

"We put in some pretty brutal years where she didn't have any support or medication," said Karen Thyret. "She refused to come home."

Now, treated with lithium, Trish Thyret lives in her own apartment. She is also one of more than 450 Londoners receiving support for intellectual disabilities through Community Living London (CLL).

Developmental service workers help Thyret find work and budget her finances. They take her shopping and bowling.

One of Thyret's workers, Denise Sands, even travelled to Florida with her and two other CLL clients.

"They're great support workers. They do all kinds of things with me," Thyret said. Most importantly, they listen to her dreams and goals, Karen Thyret said.

Sands assured Karen Thyret that she would be at the karate graduation.

But Sands, president of the Local 144 of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union, is concerned about helping others like Thyret.

Funding cuts and low staff numbers are among the issues in ongoing collective bargaining with the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

"We're in a critical moment right now," said Sands.

According to a recent OPSEU poll, 37 per cent of developmental service workers have annual household incomes below \$40,000. About 26 per cent will retire in the next 10 years.

Sands believes low wages are to blame for the decreasing number of applicants to the developmental services program at Fanshawe College.

The January program was suspended because there were too few applicants.

"Applications are down across the province . . . The pending shortage of DSW people is common knowledge now," Fanshawe spokesperson Emily Marcoccia said. She is optimistic the program will be running again.

### **Still kicking:**

From: <http://www.startribune.com/1244/story/984804.html>  
(February 6, 2007):

Jake Erling wasn't supposed to live past age 13 after being diagnosed with cystic fibrosis. Thanks largely to tae kwon do, he's got plenty of fight in him.

Nine boys and girls in bare feet and crisp, white karate uniforms line up between the slide and the parallel bars at My Gym in Eden Prairie, waiting for their chance to practice the round kick.

Jake Erling, their black-belted karate teacher, known as "Mr. Jake," brandishes a red pad as a young sandy-haired boy raises his knee, turns and lands a blow with his foot. "KEEE-AAH!" the boy yells.

"Nice, Ben," Erling says. "That was a good, hard kick. You're awesome!"

Ben scampers to the back of the line, beaming.

When Erling was Ben's age, compliments like those stuck with him forever. Because he has cystic fibrosis, a life-threatening genetic disease, people said he wouldn't live long. But simple words of praise in karate class made him believe he could be whatever he wanted to be.

"Come on, Will. Blast it. Nice kick, Will!"

Erling, 30, is so fit that he can spar with other black-belt fighters for two hours, and he often does. It seems almost inconceivable that at age 5, he wasn't expected to live past 13.

Although medical advances have contributed to his health, Erling says he owes his life to tae kwon do. He credits the discipline with keeping his lungs and body strong, and with giving him mental and spiritual fortitude, even after he developed insulin-dependent diabetes and chronic pancreatitis in his teens. Most recently, he has developed a cataract in his right eye.

"The way of martial arts is believing in yourself," he said. "It's all confidence. That determination and discipline is really what makes you. You can be as strong as you want physically, but if your mental is weak, there's no chance for you."

Susan Martinez remembers the day she learned her 5-year-old son, Jake, had cystic fibrosis (CF).

"It was devastating," she said, "and doubly so because five weeks before that, we had a stillborn son. This could not be happening. I had my first moment of, 'Oh, my God. I can't do this.' Then I thought, 'To hell with it. I know we can do this.'"

Because of a defective gene, children with CF develop thick, sticky mucus and digestive juices that can plug up tubes and passageways, especially in the lungs and pancreas. Respiratory infections are common. Fifty years ago, children with CF usually didn't survive beyond elementary school. By the mid-'80s, the life expectancy was still only 15.

Erling remembers that doctors wanted to treat him as if he were fragile. They told his parents, Martinez and Rich Erling, to set up their house like a hospital and treat him like a patient. But Martinez was confused when they also said that the way Jake felt about himself would determine how long he lived.

"I said, 'He can't do both,'" Martinez recalled.

Instead of isolating Jake, his parents told him he would live like a normal kid. They kept him away from sick people, but enrolled him in school and put him in charge of his pills, dozens a day, to encourage him to take responsibility for his health.

When kids at school would tell him they heard he wouldn't live past 7, or 11, his parents would tell him he would live as long as he wanted to.

Soon after Jake's diagnosis, his mother enrolled him in a tae kwon do class at Har-Mar Mall in Roseville. He was one of the few children in the class and was treated no differently than anybody else.

Tae kwon do taught Erling discipline, determination, dedication. He could feel his lungs and body growing stronger. He still took the medication and made frequent hospital visits to clean out his lungs, but he could forget all that when he practiced his kicks and punches.

At age 14, Erling spent 17 days in the hospital with bronchitis, a potentially deadly ailment for CF kids. A month later, he tested for and received his black belt, with his family and doctor looking on.

"He was the youngest and smallest person performing," said Dr. Stephen Kurachek, a pediatric pulmonary specialist at Children's Hospital in Minneapolis who has treated Erling since he was 12. "I'll tell you, it still brings chills to my spine."

Soon after receiving his black belt, Erling's real challenges began. He learned that he had CF-related diabetes and made constant trips to the hospital with elevated blood-sugar levels. Then chronic pancreatitis, which causes painful bouts of pancreas inflammation, set in. The combination knocked him to his knees, forcing him out of the martial arts for nearly five years.

During one of his hospital stays in his late teens, Erling took a hard look at his life. He remembered how strong and confident he had been and wanted that back. The day he was discharged, he returned to USA Karate in Brooklyn Park, where he had trained for his black belt. He has gone there nearly every Friday night since, sparring with other black belts for the better part of two hours.

Erling's CF can sometimes affect his breathing, but diabetes slows him even more. If he feels his blood sugar drop during the middle of a fight, he'll bow out and find something to eat or drink.

"It's frustrating, because I love it so much," he said. "I'm upset, sitting on the sidelines, but there's always next week."

Opponents have been shocked when they learn his story; some are reluctant to continue fighting him. "Then I just fight them harder," Erling said. "I say, 'Don't baby me.'"

Today, the median life expectancy for people with CF is 37. Erling is blessed with a milder form of the disease, according to Kurachek, who figures the aerobic component of tae kwon do is a primary reason why Erling doesn't have to undergo the daily grind of bronchial drainage.

While most cystics must undergo the procedure one to four times daily, "for Jake, we have not thrust it upon him," Kurachek said. "We know how hard he works."

Teaching is Erling's way of giving back. He began leading classes at My Gym, where most of his students have white or yellow belts, about a year ago. Erling also teaches karate to adults in St. Paul, along with working full-time as a clothing store stock manager in Brooklyn Park. Wedding bells are in his future this summer.

The kids at My Gym seem unintimidated by his appearance -- beard, shaved head, earrings, tattoos up and down his arms. He figures that a kid can tell a good soul when they see one.

"He's such a good role model," said Tedra Bonner, co-owner of the gym. "He's very strict and stern, there's no wiggle room, yet he has fun at the same time. I've seen some big changes in some of the kids. They're getting more confident."

Said Erling: "We have kids with physical challenges here. Some have autism. It might slow you down, but it can't stop you. I'm living proof."

### **Uplifting experience:**

From: [http://www.whittierdailynews.com/news/ci\\_5208576](http://www.whittierdailynews.com/news/ci_5208576)  
(February 11, 2007):

Del Harvey is finally realizing his lifelong dreams.

For the first time in his life, he is closer to managing his own money, living independently and making his own decisions.

"I've learned a lot, like being more alert and more conscious of things around me," said the 41-year-old developmentally disabled Whittier resident. "Now I am able to know how to take care of myself."

Harvey credits karate and his martial arts instructor, Kyoshi Anthony Marquez, for his new outlook.

For the past five months, Marquez, a veteran martial artist from Victorville, has been teaching Harvey and 30 other developmentally disabled adults Gujo Do karate, the martial art of Okinawa, Japan.

"A lot of times their opportunities for socialization and their motivation is limited. We're trying to change that dynamic," said J.D. Lieber, program coordinator for Mercedes Diaz Homes and Affiliates, a Whittier-based social service group that hired Marquez to work with clients.

On Sunday, his students showcased their newfound skills at a special promotion ceremony at the Neighborhood Center in Santa Fe Springs. The class performed a series of self-defense techniques needed to qualify for a yellow belt, the second step of skill levels in martial arts.

But the students have also gained lessons in discipline, respect and, most importantly, confidence, program officials said.

"Their lives have changed. They think positive, they try their best, and they're excited," said Julie Villegas, who assists Marquez in the class.

Marquez, 57, created Possibilities Unlimited International, a specialized martial arts program designed for adults with emotional, physical and cognitive challenges.

His goal is to empower students to "reach a level that they don't think they could reach by themselves," he said. His motto is simple: "I can and will."

"The developmentally disabled are the last demographics in society, and they are always left behind," said Marquez. "I decided I was going to make a difference."

Lieber has also noticed transformations in his clients.

"Now many of them are raising their hands and shouting out answers. They're making their presence known in class," he said. "To see them have excitement about something, to have a buy-in in this, it's wonderful."

### **Martial arts 'a godsend' to autistic pair:**

From: <http://www.southcoasttoday.com/daily/02-07/02-13-07/09local.htm>  
(February 13, 2007):

Earning a black belt in tae kwon do takes dedication, commitment and discipline for any child, but for two autistic SouthCoast boys, it also took courage.

Ian Mayo and Collin O'Brien have been studying at Kwon's U.S. Tae Kwon Do Center in North Dartmouth for four years. Both boys earned their black belts on Jan. 27. Both boys are autistic.

Ten-year-old Ian has Asperger's syndrome, a form of autism. As a result, he has limited social skills and sensory problems.

Those limitations made Pam and Robert Mayo of Dartmouth nervous about putting their son into tae kwon do.

"What if he doesn't behave? What if he doesn't listen? What if he runs around? That's all I could think of," said Mrs. Mayo.

Ian surprised everyone, not only with his enthusiasm and performance in class, but with how much he has grown through the program.

"He loved it," said Mrs. Mayo. "This was the place where no one judges him. He's able to focus and do what he's supposed to do. This place was a godsend."

Mrs. Mayo credits the patience and understanding of the instructors for Ian's success, even outside of class.

"The instructors have taught him some techniques to help his self control and anger, and he has made an effort to utilize the techniques that have been given to him," said Mrs. Mayo.

Ten-year-old Collin's communication skills are limited, but since he began tae kwon do, his ability to focus and pay attention seems to have improved. Collin's mother, Suzanne White, said his martial-arts class experience has helped him in school.

"I didn't even think he'd get half the way there," said Ms. White, who lives in New Bedford. "I'm very proud of my boy. That's a major accomplishment."

Collin studies tae kwon do in the same class with his brother Derek, who is 15 months older. Derek also earned his black belt last month.

"Derek helps him out a lot," said Ms. White. "He grew up with (his brother's) disability and you do what needs to be done. You just work with it."

As for the impact Collin's autism has had on the family, Ms. White said it is hard to imagine life being any other way.

"You learn to accept things as they are, not as they could have been or might be, because you just don't know," said Ms. White. "For right now, this is how it is."

"To see my son make so many changes and make so much progress and become so successful in society, as a parent you want to embrace all of the things that allow this to happen," said Ms. Mayo.

### **Martial arts classes double as life lessons:**

From: <http://www.azcentral.com/news/articles/0217mr-karate0217.html>  
(February 17, 2007):

Arizona -- There are two brothers, as the story goes.

One had the heart of a lion but a mouth like a hyena, always meaning well but never knowing when or how to restrain himself.

The other, the first son, had the heart of a cub but the poise of a groundhog in winter, always wanting to mean well but never appearing from behind his own personal wall.

Their father knows both worlds and longed to see his sons grow as he has grown. So he had them learn martial arts and its traditional teachings. Seven months passed and the sons began to grow as their father had.

The lion-hearted, hyena-mouthed one learned self-control. The other gained self-confidence, a groundhog in winter no more.

This is the story of Kirk Konecny of Apache Junction and his sons Hunter, 11, and Brandon, 8. The martial arts school, Spalding's World Class Karate in Mesa, has helped mold them through its teaching of life philosophies.

"I think it's one of the best things I've ever done for them," Kirk Konecny said of signing his sons up at Spalding's, which earned the United States Martial Arts Hall of Fame 2006 School of the Year for its youth curriculum. "It worked for both kids for different reasons."

Daniel Spalding, school owner and fifth-degree master black belt, has seen many of his students progress like the Konecny brothers. Developing his students is the main reason why he opened his school in 1999.

"To me the core (of the school's programs) is personal development and life skills," said Spalding, 32, a former karate national champion.

"We take martial arts more for a daily application than a kicking and punching sport. We have the sport aspect to it where kids go and compete in tournaments, but we also teach something you can use every day to make the right decisions."

All of Spalding's programs, which include a leadership course, focus on learning something positive and new every session.

"One of my theories is that there is not one style that is best," he said.

"Everything has something good to offer. I trained in different parts of the country and different martial arts and disciplines and liked what they had to offer. So when I opened a school, I thought about how can we integrate those into a system so people can get the most out of it. We have the greatest possible variety we can offer and still stay strong and grounded, having programs that have respect and tradition in them."

Jerry Church, instructor and first-degree black belt, said that's what has made their programs popular.

"It's the fact that we're not just teaching a self-defense class, we're teaching a life skill with it," said Church, who will open Spalding's second school in Gilbert this summer.

"If you talk to anybody here, that's what draws most people in. They're really looking for more than just a martial arts studio."