



## At Elkhorn business, self-defense is the ...

# FAMILY DISCIPLINE

Martial arts builds strong ties for Perk clan

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STAFF WRITER

ELKHORN — Courtesy, humility, integrity, perseverance, self-control and indomitable spirit. These are qualities that anyone could benefit from learning. However, students at the Elkhorn Martial Arts Center are expected to master them because they're major tenets of kyuki-do, a discipline that Bob and Audrey Perk teach to every member of the local Flying Dragons.

The school's motto is, "The ultimate goal of kyuki-do lies neither in victory nor in defeat, but in the perfection of the character of its participants."

They have about 100 students, ranging in age from 4 to 56. Every student must

pass a test to attain each of the 12 ranks, or belts, which takes four to five years combined in most cases.

"It's constant learning," said Bob Perk, who recently from Rockwell to

devote more time to the center. "Helping kids and families develop skills and keep growing is what keeps me going."

"Hopefully, most students won't have to use their martial arts, but the skills and repetitions help them intuitively learn how to fall and roll and avoid injuries and do things to save themselves if necessary."

The Perks embarked on their martial arts journey in 1981 at Cho's in Waukesha, where they learned the kwon do. They moved to Lake Geneva three years later, and after a six-year break to start a family, they resumed training with their children at Royal West Martial Arts Academy in Delavan, where the focus was kyuki-do.

In 1995, they took over the Lake Geneva Flying Dragons. They outgrew the facility in Como and moved to their current location on Geneva Street in Elkhorn in 2002, renaming it the Elkhorn Martial Arts Center.

The husband and wife have earned black belts in judo and study and teach aikido and iaido. Bob Perk also has a black belt in hapkido. They became the first and only husband-and-wife team to attain the master title together, achieving that distinction this past December.

Their son, Nicholas, also teaches introductory classes and handles marketing duties for the business. Their daughter,



TERRY MAYER/STAFF

Robert Perk, right, works with a student at the Elkhorn Martial Arts Center. The practice of kyuki-do, one of the martial arts, is a family affair for Perk, his wife, Audrey, and grown children, Rebecca and Nicholas.

Rebecca, 25, is a third-degree black belt.

"Audrey and I wanted to do something together, and that's how we got started," Perk said. "And that's what is the nice thing about having a family business ... that you can be out there with your children."

Their efforts earned them School of the Year honors in 2004. And it all goes back to kyuki-do, which officially was recognized as a martial art in 1979 — the American Kyuki-Do Federation was formed to sanction and govern the art — despite having roots that date back thousands of years.

The discipline combines kicks and strikes of the kwon do, joint manipulation and controlling techniques of hapkido, takedowns of judo, grappling maneuvers of jujitsu, traditional weaponry and techniques of many other forms into a complete defensive art.

"The idea is to build muscle memory, so that everything becomes reflex instead of them thinking about it," Perk said. "If they attend twice a week for 50 weeks, and they practice something 10 times, that's 1,000 (repetitions) a year."

Nicholas Perk, 28, is a classic example of how martial arts can help turn someone's life around or push them in the right direction.

"I was always getting bullied as a young child, so I started striking back and actually got kicked off the school bus one time," said Nicholas Perk, who was diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. "In my 7-year-old mind, it was a way to beat up the bullies. Before taking up martial arts, I had zero tolerance. But since starting the training, I've never had to use it."

Learning to control emotions is a big part of the kyuki-do handbook, but the

physical and mental training have helped the Perks' son and other students in myriad ways.

"Since middle school, I was concerned about what I'd be remembered for," said Nicholas Perk, who got a business degree from his father's alma mater, Michigan Tech University. "I'd read books about (Alfred) Einstein, (Isaac) Newton and the presidents, and they all left legacies. And even though middle or high school was a little early, I wanted to do something worthwhile, like be a NASA engineer, and that was my goal when I got out of college."

"But reality stepped in ... life is what happens when you're busy making plans," he said. "Working here means we're touching every student's life, that even if we only see them for six months, we can provide a serious impact. The goal always is to get better and keep learning. They might remember something that may help them open a door."

Jodi Heisz of Delavan is one student who continues to take advantage of her martial arts training. She graduated from Gateway Technical College in Elkhorn with a degree in graphic design and works at GS Marketing Group in Kenosha.

"I wanted to learn how to defend myself, and I've always been interested in the beauty of the martial arts themselves, and it was that combination that drew me to them in general," said Heisz, who has trained under the Perks for 10 years, reaching third-degree black belt status. "And I've always been somebody who likes to do challenging things."

She became a black belt six or seven years ago and said being a part of the Flying Dragons has made her a much better person.

"Martial arts definitely has helped me grow emotionally, spiritually and physically," Heisz said. "It challenges you to do better personally, with your family and career. It teaches teamwork and respect, which helps with co-workers and your

### AT A GLANCE

The Elkhorn Martial Arts Center is located at 799 E. Geneva St. in Elkhorn. For more information:

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kids. Participating definitely carries over into the rest of my personal life."

And she is applying what she's learned to help other students at the center.

"I've been focusing the past two or three months on helping out in class," she said. "It's a lot of work, but I want to help the kids and see the school grow."

Bob Perk said there's no greater confidence than being able to defend yourself, but that's only one of the results they hope people take away from their sessions.

"Students learn how to deal with being bullied, but much more than from a physical standpoint," he said. "It's like verbal judo. You learn to put away those initial feelings of anger and de-escalate situations. Society doesn't always value that approach, but that's what we do in class and hopefully they take it away from here."

The physical movements work much like a verbal assault, Bob Perk said.

"You recognize what your weaknesses are, what your hot buttons are and when others press those buttons," he said. "Many students are afraid to make mistakes, but this is where you want to make mistakes, because you can't afford to make them outside the classroom."

"The best part is when they come back and tell us that it's worked for them. That makes everything worth it and so rewarding."

"It challenges you to do better personally with your family and career."

— Jodi Heisz, martial arts student



N. PERK