

Lifestyle



By Romi Herron

Staff writer

In the Far East, where Grand Master Gedo Chang was born more than 60 years ago, the morning dawn is sacred. As the sun rises, it is well known in his native South Korea that one can obtain great power and strength in harmonizing with nature.

It is that sense of harmony, and inner peace, that Chang believes his students can reach with two art forms: ki and hapkido.

Chang, an eighth-degree black belt in the Korean self-defense art, has shared his philosophy of the power of the human spirit to local students for 29 years. During the 1980s, he taught hapkido at Elmhurst College for about five years.

At the Lombard and Naperville locations of Chang's Hapkido Academy, he continues to center his teachings not on combat, but on love. He has more than 300 students.

"All humans have a natural instinct to develop their full potential," Chang said. "Through a process called self-actualization, we can tap into our potentials and increase the capacities for success and love."

For that process to begin, he said, self-confidence is required. And that is where hapkido and ki training come into the picture.

Martial arts master focuses on peace and love



Ahead of a trend

When the Lombard school first opened, martial arts were not as trendy as they are now. With many spinoffs of traditional martial arts programs available at park districts and after-school programs, students are generally not offered the meditative training and spiritual component that Chang brings from the Orient.

Hapkido is derived from three Korean words. Hap is the coordination of the mind and body. Ki is the inner energy that is created and manifested through hap. Do is the self-controlled and disciplined life necessary to create hap and ki, according to Chang.

While some non-traditional programs are generally geared toward street fighting, performance exhibitions, and the use of weapons, Chang's emphasis is

personal development and peace, not aggression.

It is for that reason that Lombard attorney Nedal Zayed, a fourth-degree black belt, has studied with Chang for 17 years and enrolled two of his sons and one daughter in the school.

"I started hapkido when I was 5. I choose to participate in hapkido over other sports mainly because of my focus and commitment to the discipline," Nedal Jr. said. "The self-defense will be with me my whole life."

Currently, Nedal is one level away from earning his black belt.

The self-confidence and personal development training have also reached the very young.

Chang said a 3-year-old student has made great strides.

"When he first came to me, this little boy was shy and quiet," Chang said.

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From left, I hap Brindise practices skills with fellow students during hapkido class. The goal, Master Gedo Chang says, is to subdue the opponent with minimal injury. Instructor Laura Austria practices with a student. Master Gedo Chang of Naperville talks to his students about concentrating during hapkido class at the Lombard Chang's Hapkido Academy. Chang, an eighth-degree black belt, has taught hapkido at the Lombard location for 29 years.

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"After a couple of months, his mother told me he was beginning to change. In the past, he had a recurring nightmare about a wolf and would awaken crying.

"After he started hapkido training, he told his mother one morning that he had a dream about the wolf again, but he palm-attacked it and the wolf ran away. That self-confidence is an example of how students benefit from this discipline."

In addition, many young girls in the school said they have chosen to practice hapkido over ballet or skating because it gives them security they can only achieve through practicing self-defense.

To accommodate the diverse age range of students, class structure is designed so that the students of all ages and gender can come to as many or as few classes as they choose during the week. The participants of a given class period always vary, so the training adapts from day to day, class to class.

Turn when pushed

John Considine, a fourth-degree black belt and an instructor at the

said. "It is a softer approach to living."

Allan Izzo of Elmhurst said his hapkido training has exceeded his expectations.

"The reason I have become so committed to this is because it is so much more than just a physical work out," Izzo said. "The mental training and the spiritual component have done so much for me."

Doug Evans, of Downers Grove, is a fourth-degree black belt who has studied under Chang for more than 20 years. Evans said the meditation component of hapkido helped him overcome career challenges.

"I was being challenged by someone professionally who wanted to take over my business," Evans said. "I had recurring nightmares that I was trying to enter a castle but this



into the water below," Evans said.

The nightmares ceased, and Evans found the confidence to successfully overcome his professional challenges using Chang's guidance.

Close ties

With more than 15 classes offered each week, Chang maintains a closeness with each of his students.

He designs methods of teaching to adjust to learning styles of each individual. He shows warmth and gentleness to the young children, and he is a commanding, strong presence to adults. He has an aura about him that draws students of all ages to believe they can overcome their greatest fears, and he often talks to the class about parenting.

"When parents squeeze their children too hard by controlling and restricting them too much, they cause the children to become dependent on them," Chang said. "Motivational, psychological and physical impairment occur. When children are encouraged and enabled through challenges like hapkido, they begin to thrive."

Child-rearing, spirituality, love and human behavior are areas on which Chang has lectured in several countries. He has also written five books.

Chang's four adult children and his wife Chanjoo are all black belts and have studied and taught hapkido with Chang over the years.

Currently, his youngest son, Saejin, a fourth-degree black belt, and daughter, Laura, a third-degree black belt, offer instruction at their father's school in addition to their professions. On Saturdays, they teach together with Chang.

The school offers advancement through rank tests, held every two months.

Other world renowned hapkido masters are invited to serve as judges to determine if the students are ready to move on to more advanced techniques and wear new belts.

Ki students say Chang has taught them to seek overall wellness by giv-

Naperville school, said he learned from Chang the importance of having enough self-control to walk away from a fight with honor.

"All actions have a consequence," Considine said. "It is important to avoid confrontations at all costs. The negative energy that is used to hurt someone always comes back to you, whether it is in the form of guilt, anxiety, depression, or other ways."

Hapkido uses circular motions, in which the momentum of the assailant is used against him or her, when throws, twists and pressure point techniques are applied. The goal, Chang says, is to subdue the opponent with minimal injury.

The circle has its strong symbolism in Chang's philosophy on daily living too.

"The repetition of practicing the circular motions over and over again also teaches the students to be well-rounded," Chang

wizard was always blocking my way. Master Chang helped me to meditate, and eventually, I actually had another dream that I was on the castle again, and this time, I managed to overcome the wizard and throw him

Philip Brindise (left) of Elmhurst spars with instructor Saejin Chang of Naperville. Philip was recognized as Student of the Year 2002 for his leadership abilities at the Lombard Chang's Hapkido Academy. Michelle Simi (top, left) of Hanover Park practices hapkido techniques with instructor Laura Austria, who is Master Gedo Chang's daughter and a third-degree black belt.



Staff photos by Erica Benson

ing attention to the human soul and spirit. At daybreak, the class participants from all walks of life read passages aloud from selected books. Then Chang offers a discussion and motivational speech based on the literature and his own experiences.

Randy Svendsen, of Warrenville, said the ki class meditative breathing techniques have helped him control his diabetes.

Though some students have said Chang has done more for them than any teacher they have ever known, and most of the children show him more respect than they give their own parents, Chang feels his contributions are not extraordinary.

It is a simple way of teaching: for a simple way of life, he says.

On a wall in the Lombard school hangs a picture of Chang and his wife of 37 years. Above it is a water-color calligraphy work of art that reads: "If there is beauty in the character, then there will be harmony in the home. If there is harmony in the home, then there will be order in the nation. If there is order in the nation, then there will be peace in the world."

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