

Karate: A parent's perspective at Truckee-Donner Recreation & Park District

By Kristen Lyle

TRUCKEE, Calif. — As the saying goes, “It takes a village to raise a child.” We are fortunate in our Truckee “village” to have Sensei Tony Altieri and the karate program he offers through Truckee-Donner Recreation & Parks District. Remember the original “Karate Kid”? Think of Tony as a modern-day Mr. Miyagi and know your child will be in good hands at his Pacific Crest Martial Arts dojo.

Teaching the fundamentals of karate is the framework, but Sensei Tony continuously shows the children what they're learning can be applied in their lives. Tony sits them down and discusses and breaks down what they were doing so they know why it's important to learn such things. He's helping them to become good world citizens. He emphasizes respect to oneself and to others; manners in karate, at school and at home and self-discipline. The focus is always on self-improvement. I have often heard Tony say: “Put your thinking caps on and do the best you can.”

The principles and skills of the traditional karate Tony teaches follow the Shito-Ryu method, a style described as “hard and soft.” A kick might be “hard” but learning to receive and block a punch through proper technique is the opposite, or “soft.” In addition to individual moves, students also learn Katas: practiced karate routines memorized and repeated in order to advance to higher belt levels. Katas instill focus and self-discipline in a constructive and fun way. The graceful sequences demonstrate a combination of physical and mental effort and demand balance between the two.

Classes are taught with the help of the Senpai (student assistants with more advanced belts). In fact, any student who has a higher belt level is encouraged and expected to help and make those at lower levels feel welcome. They are also responsible for modeling behavior worthy of their belt status. As Tony explains, Sensei simply means “one who has been there before.”

The atmosphere in Tony's dojo is one of encouragement; it is not militaristic. He is politely firm with the students when they lose their focus or kime (pronounced “keemay”), which means strong mind. Lack of effort brings Tony's attention as he holds the students accountable. Merited praise is liberally distributed. The overtone of each session is one of positive reinforcement.

Classes are a mixture of hard work and fun (hard and soft, again). Students progress through steps that are routinely reviewed and repeated, although the classes never seem repetitive or the same. Tony does a good job of mixing things up and customizing practices to meet student needs and hold their attention.

Overall, the best part of the karate program is the life messages of accountability, effort, and manners my husband and I convey to our son daily. The words, thoughts, and actions taught come from a respected outside voice that's received by the students as being different from the dreaded “nagging parent” voice. Many parents and family members come to observe karate class and when an important point is being driven home or a small life lesson is getting through to the kids, you see smiles and appreciative nods throughout the audience. You know the parents are sitting there watching the learning soak in and quietly cheering to themselves.

Recently, The Truckee dojo hosted an All Girls Sports Day which was well attended by some 57 girls. Sensei Tony and assistants had a great time sharing Karate-do with them.

