

BLACK BELT:

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It was like putting ducks in water for the first time, and together they have paddled through the rainbow of karate belts, each signifying a higher level of expertise.

From white to pink to levels of brown and finally to black belt, which all three of the adults achieved together after three years of training. Ryan has already achieved a brown belt level.

"It just worked for us because it's interesting, helps keep you in shape and provides camaraderie," said Mahoney.

He was a career military man, serving 31 years in the National Guard and retiring as a colonel and director of logistics for the Rhode Island National Guard. After retirement, he taught organizational behavior classes at Bryant University, Johnson & Wales University, Community College of Rhode Island and Worcester State College, all on a part-time basis, for 16 years.

With his military training came a good amount of physical fitness, and following his retirement from the National Guard, Mahoney said he attempted several workout and exercise regimens.

"But I got bored running up and down along Mendon Road and with other exercise programs," said Mahoney. "Karate is the first thing that I've found interesting enough to stick with in the past 10 years. For me, the best part is the exercise that I get because I've always been physically active, but there is also great camaraderie and spending time with my daughter and grandson."

He works out three times each week at the dojo, and

occasionally gets some work in on Saturdays. His wife, Mercedes, is also active in retirement, but prefers aerobics classes, Mahoney said.

Karate, and particularly the shotokan variety, are frequently misunderstood by the general public, said Mahoney.

"It must be all those Bruce Lee movies," he said.

Actually, the martial arts form that he studies is a defensive speciality, one that requires hours and hours of physically demanding drills practicing various techniques to improve proficiency. That makes it a strong aerobics workout, said Mahoney.

"What people have to understand is that karate is a great exercise for every muscle and joint in your body," said Laliberte. "It's great to build endurance and is a form of Zen meditation in motion, so it is foremost for body health, spiritual-psychological health, and lastly a system to help defend yourself."

He has become proficient enough that he assists in the teaching of karate to youngsters to assist St. Pierre, and he admits it is enjoyable working with children and monitoring their progress. He and St. Pierre would like to offer a class for senior citizens, provided enough interest can be generated.

"Seniors can handle a lot of the things that are required here," said Mahoney.

St. Pierre said that shotokan stresses perfection of character, being truthful, respecting others and refraining from violent behavior. But it also provides strong tools for self-defense should the need arise, he said.

Mahoney said a portion of the training involves actual combat, but it is controlled, with the students stopping short of delivering physical blows, instead focusing on technique.

"It's all pretty well orchestrated in class, but I have no doubt that it would translate into reality if one of us were accosted," said Mahoney. "We have learned and practiced the skills."