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MARTIAL ARTS TOURNEY DRAWS COMPETITORS FROM FIVE STATES

Participants learn more than just how to fight

by Marge Neal

The Dundalk-based Maryland Professional Karate Association has been holding martial arts tournaments for nearly 40 years.

But the 89th edition, held at the Dundalk Campus of The Community College of Baltimore County on April 22, had a new twist.

"It was the first time I opened it up to everyone," MPKA founder David Grosscup said of the event, which drew 122 competitors from Virginia, West Virginia, Pennsylvania and Delaware as well as the host state.

For years, karate schools from outside Maryland begged to be invited to Grosscup's tournament, he said, and this year he relented.

CCBC Dundalk's gym was a beehive of activity from early in the morning, when more than 30 volunteers arrived to set up, until after 5 p.m., as the last participants wrestled their trophies and athletic bags to their cars and the volunteers began to clean up.

Grosscup said his tournaments have the reputation of being well-run and are set up so that "everyone has a fair chance."

"We organize matches in age, size and belt rank, and also have levels for adults, beginners, intermediate, senior and advanced," he said.

Not only will the obvious not occur — a beginning adult going up against a beginning child — but a tiny young beginner won't be pitted against a larger young beginner, Grosscup said.

Three types of competition make up the tournament, according to Grosscup, himself a 10th-dan (degree) black belt.

"We have forms, which are dancelike," he said. "They fight against an imaginary opponent. There's also weapons and fighting, or what we call free sparring."

Grosscup feels there's a lot more to martial arts than meets the eye.

"We can do a lot in our program that the schools can't do," he said. "We can motivate the children, discipline them, give advice and discuss philosophy with them.

"And we do all this in front of parents who approve of what we do."

The instructor said that often, children enrolling in his



Two martial artists mix it up at last month's Maryland Professional Karate Association tournament at CCBC Dundalk. *photos by Marge Neal*

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programs are shy, getting picked on at school or suffer from attention deficit disorders.

Many students also come from single-parent homes, so Grosscup said he and other male instructors are often the only father figure a child might have to look up to.

Learning to perform in front of peers builds children's self-esteem, Grosscup feels, and teaches them to win and lose graciously.

"I can't tell you how many times I've had a student come to me and say, 'If it wasn't for you, I don't know what would have happened in my life,'" he said. "And parents come to me and say, 'You've turned my child into a leader.'"

Events like these tournaments contribute to the positive development of youngsters and adults alike, Grosscup feels, which is why the 90th such tourney is already being planned for November.

"And we have an agreement with the college that we're going to be there a long time," he said. "They're thrilled with how we take care of the place and we're thrilled to be there."



Referee Charles Sturgill restarts a match after the awarding of a point to one of the young competitors.



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