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WesternSpringsPatch

THE NEIGHBORHOOD FILES

"KARATE REV" BLENDS MARTIAL ARTS AND WORSHIP AT W.S. BAPTIST CHURCH

Dave Pearson's ministry is equal parts Bible and block-breaking as he teaches Christian karate to all ages.

By [Darren McRoy](#) | [Email the author](#) | 5:55am
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Karate Dave stands before his class and puts up his dukes. A fifth-degree black belt, he wears an imposing black gi and speaks in a booming baritone. A moment ago, he has demonstrated the power to smash through four three-inch concrete slabs.

As he raises his fists, he names them, as a five-year-old boy once solemnly taught him. The one is “bible study,” the other, “prayer;” together, he says, they form a true “guard for God.”

Karate Dave is Reverend Dave Pearson, the founder of the Christian Karate Council and his own Master’s Martial Arts Academy, a traveling program based as much in Christian teachings as ancient Japanese martial arts. Pearson teaches in 12 locations around the Chicago suburbs, his newest being Western Springs Baptist Church, where he began offering lessons in November.

Pearson describes his karate as a Korean adaptation called Champion style: a mix of judo, jujitsu and tangsudo. His students range from preschoolers to their grandparents, training side by side. Their sparring is “light-touch,” without full contact or kicks to the head.

“I’ve seen a blossoming in this ministry,” Pearson said. “There’s a need, I guess, even in the Christian community, of knowing basic self-defense.”

But he added that the benefits of karate go well beyond being able to deliver kicks and punches in a pinch.

“Martial arts can increase your strength, flexibility, coordination, reaction time, focus, concentration, self confidence and leadership skills,” Pearson said. “Students can easily apply these skills to their daily lives at work, school and at home with their families.”

Pearson himself first turned to martial arts to escape a difficult childhood. A boy of the Chicago South Side who never knew his biological parents, he lost his adoptive mother in Lake Michigan at age four. Years later, in 2001, he would lose his wife to cancer.

“As I got older, I realized that these tragedies that happened in my life—that I would use my talents and abilities for kids and their families,” he said. “I think that because I went through some tragedies in my life, that really forced me into what I’m doing today.”

He studied martial arts alongside theology at the Moody Bible Institute, received his (first-degree) black belt in 1980, and began his ministry in 1988. Over the past two decades, he says, he has taught thousands of students while working his way up to fifth-degree (soon to test for sixth).

Last Thursday, his first Western Springs class of 2011 convened in the gymnasium of the Western Springs Baptist Church: about 30 students, several families, kids and parents alike. They stretch, watch *kata* form demonstrations, split into groups and practice various blocks, then have mock fights with large foam swords.

Many of the exercises are given symbolic Christian meanings as well; each physical lesson is accompanied by a spiritual one. Control over desire and anger are heavily emphasized. "I can train somebody to black belt and they can take on five guys," Pearson announces to his class. "But can they handle one temptation?"

Dean Nelson, a Western Springs resident and student at the College of DuPage, performed a demonstration for the class with whirling foam nunchucks. He is a longtime practitioner of taekwondo, and a general lover of martial art.

"I love troubleshooting computers, but I was getting pretty chubby and my parents wanted me to exercise," he said of his initial forays. "What you get out of it depends on how much you push yourself. You'll break a sweat fast if you put full power into every move."

Steve Cochlan of Hinsdale attended the class with his wife Susan and kids Cullen, 8, Stephanie, 7, and Cassidy, 5. Steve, Cullen and Cassidy are all green belts; Susan and Cassidy wear gold. The family has been training with Rev. Pearson for 15 months, formerly driving to his classes in Naperville.

"It teaches respect and discipline, and it's a great way to work out," Steve Cochlan said. "It's been a real blessing for our family."

Rev. Pearson's classes take place every Thursday evening from 4:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. in the Western Springs Baptist Church gymnasium. Classes are \$10 per individual; \$20 per family; new students are always welcome.