

Martial arts studio offers the Competitive Edge

By Jon Campisi
Staff Writer

At the far edge of the Fort Washington Office Park, where Virginia Drive meets Delaware Avenue, sits a new martial arts studio that prides itself on familial interaction.

It's called Competitive Edge Martial Arts Training Center, and not only does it train members of the entire family, but it is run by a close-knit one as well.

The school, which began offering classes in February, is owned and operated by Maple Glen residents Ron and Sharon Monroe.

The story of how the studio came to pass is fairly atypical as far as martial arts business ventures go. Sharon was a working mom whose only exposure to sport fighting came from her eldest son, 16-year-old Ronnie, an Upper Dublin High School junior and an internationally ranked tae kwon do champion.

Dad, a doctor and cancer researcher, took martial arts as a youngster, but couldn't afford to train for long. He has coached children in other sports for many years, but the karate didn't come back into play until Ronnie's involvement.

So where exactly did the idea for Competitive Edge come from?

"[We said] it's time to open up our own school ... in the

community we live in," Ron said.

Ronnie, now a second degree black belt, began training at age 4. He obtained his black belt at the North Penn YMCA, then moved to a school in Dresher, and eventually found a trainer in New Jersey. But the trek got to be too much.

And then there is Brandon, 9, the couple's other son. Already a black belt, Sharon said martial arts training has helped the otherwise shy boy to "come out of his shell."

"He's more comfortable being around people," Sharon said of Brandon, who sort of mentors the younger participants at Competitive Edge.

Ron and Sharon soon realized that having their own studio would enable them to watch their children train, spend more time with the family, train themselves, and teach others in the community — sort of a way of giving back to a place they love.

The school offers classes to children 3 to 5 years old, 6 to 11 years old, and a teen/adult group for those 12 and over. The base training is in tae kwon do, but Competitive Edge does offer jujitsu, a fighting style that utilizes more wrestling and groundwork. Jujitsu originated in Japan, but eventually spread to Brazil, and today, both schools are practiced widely within the martial arts community. According to Ron,

Competitive Edge has even been designated an official "Gracie" jujitsu school, after the Brazilian family of fighters who took the sport to the next level.

At this time, Competitive Edge utilizes one large room for all of its activities. Eventually, when the back room is complete, the school will have a total of 5,500 square feet of instructional space. Construction is expected to be complete by next winter. The unfinished room will house offices, restrooms, (the part that's already up-and-running), a workout area, and additional class space.

"It's going to be a nice facility," Sharon said.

Besides the building itself, Competitive Edge offers some quality training from some very qualified teachers.

By day, Marie O'Donnell is the director of the Carson Valley private school in Flourtown. By night, this certified black belt is teaching groups of youngsters how to throw punches and kicks with the best of them.

O'Donnell, who is short in stature but big in heart, admitted that the dichotomy between her day and night work is kind of strange, but not totally unusual.

"I have a doctorate in education, so the teaching piece is easy. It's putting together those pieces" that's difficult, she said, referring to giving stu-

dents well-rounded skill instruction, while at the same time allowing them to be kids and interact with others their own age. And smaller classes, she said, help to accomplish that.

But teaching tae kwon do is also an outlet; it gives her a chance to engage in something other than her administrative duties.

"It kind of balances me out a little bit," she said.

And then, of course, there's the family atmosphere.

"There's just a closeness among everybody," she said. "They're sweating and smiling."

Ron and Sharon also secured help from Michael Schmidt, a karate and jujitsu champion with many credentials under his belt, so to speak; and Ray and Jeff Manosca, two local twenty-somethings who are champions in various martial arts forms.

Right now, Ron and Sharon are just trying to get the word out about their new school. They urge anyone in the area looking for discipline for their children, a new hobby, or just a good workout, to swing by and check them out. They're even running a summer special — three months of tae kwon do for \$50 a month.

And if there's any question as to their dedication, Sharon is ready to clear the air.

"I live here," she said joking-



Gazette staff photo by BOB RAINES

Brandon Moore kicks at a body bag at Competitive Edge martial arts studio.

ly. "I have a cot in the back, I think."

For more information about

Competitive Edge Martial Arts Training Center, call 215-283-5258.