

This book cover reveals all Berwynite is the father of martial arts in Ireland

By Tim Egan

Berwyn resident John McSweeney, 65, is a man you can judge by the cover of his book, "Battleaxe — A Warriors' Tale."

McSweeney has dedicated 40 years to the world of martial arts and is president and founder of the American Kenpo Karate Association. He also introduced karate to Ireland in 1962.

"He's very Irish," said student and fourth-degree black belt Tom Saviano, "and very deadly. He's a premier and total martial artist."

In October, 250 of his peers, students and friends honored McSweeney with a banquet, hosted by Saviano, to celebrate his four decades in the martial arts.

"People came out of the woodwork to honor him," Saviano said. "There were over 60 black belts in attendance. We're talking some pretty heavy hitters. It was a phenomenal night."

McSweeney, who served in World War II

as a gunner in the U.S. Navy, began his martial arts career in 1952 at the Kodokan, "the Harvard of judo in Japan," according to Saviano.

In 1959, McSweeney began training with Ed Parker, the "father of American karate."

After three years, McSweeney journeyed to Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland, where he earned his master's degree in economic geography.

While in Ireland, McSweeney did for the Irish what Parker did for the United States.

And, McSweeney still owns a school on the Emerald Isle. He also operates Self-Defense Unlimited in Elmhurst, which opened in 1980.

In his time back in the United States, McSweeney has written a book, given seminars and created his own form of exercise video using a technique he dubbed "Tiger Moves."

McSweeney combined Chinese kung fu stretching with his interpretation of the way animals such as a tiger perform exercise routines.

"It's an internal resistance," McSweeney said, "that increases blood flow and

strengthens the joints. It energizes the body and doesn't dissipate energy. It keeps me young. It hasn't kept me 21. I'm aging, but I've slowed the process down."

Like many martial artists, McSweeney has chosen weapons to master, but not Japanese nunchakus or samurai swords.

"They aren't the weapons of today," Saviano said. "Those are ancient. Master McSweeney chooses the handgun and knife because they are modern weapons. He's a man of the 21st century."

McSweeney authored an information booklet on the art of handgun use and knife fighting. He also hosted a armed self-defense seminar in November.

"He's an innovator," said Saviano.

And sometimes his innovations differ from the usual arts.

"He's very unique in his training," Saviano said. "Every system in the world trains barefoot, including Kenpo. But with Master McSweeney, you train with shoes on. His theory is that when you go out in the street, you've got shoes on."

With McSweeney's background, success and respect, no one is going to tell him to take them off, either.



McSweeney