

Grandfather studies martial arts

Oak Brook's Carlson enjoys taekwondo classes

By Tim Egan

A typical Tuesday night taekwondo class at J. Kidd's Academy in Hillside is just underway and the students are putting together the things they've learned in past classes.

Blocks, kicks and punches are broken up by the exhales of sound that tell a would-be victim's attacker that they are not easy prey.

The sound of "kkkkeeeiii's" fill the room.

One student in the class clearly stands out and not because he has the loudest grunt or deepest exhale.

It's his silver hair.

Oak Brook resident Harold Carlson, a 66-year-old grandfather, is in his second month of taekwondo training and enjoying every minute of it.

"I'm the oldest kid on the block," he said. "And as a white belt, I'm at the bottom rung."

After limited satisfaction with a personal fitness program, Carlson learned about the school through an advertisement and registered for classes.

"He's not here for fighting," said Jerry Kidd, the school's owner and instructor. "There are obviously other benefits. He's in it to be in an athletic program, to feel good about himself and he's here just having fun."

Carlson said the classes combine everything he wanted to stay fit.

"I thought I was working out until I came to class," he said. "When I get through, I'm sopping wet with sweat, but I feel



LIFE photo by Bryan Carpenter

Oak Brook resident Harold Carlson (at right) practices during a taekwondo class the 66-year-old grandfather is taking.

good. When you get the blood pumping, you really feel like you're accomplishing something."

He also pointed out the importance of the instructor and his classmates.

"Mr. Kidd has wonderful philosophies," Carlson said. "He's a great motivator, in fact his whole staff is. It's like a family. I basically didn't know

what I was signing up for. I didn't know what to expect. But they made me feel at home."

The philosophy is to teach taekwondo in an atmosphere where intimidation and force are substituted with encouragement and humor.

"The camaraderie that's here, it's a nice mix of people," Carlson said. "It's good motivation. You meet a lot of nice people who are very supportive and very patient."

Taekwondo has become a two-way street for Carlson, according to Kidd.

As much as Carlson puts into his classes, the classes are benefiting from his presence.

"He's a great addition to our school," Kidd said, "because he's going to introduce a lot of

people to the fact that martial arts is for everyone. Regardless of age, creed, color or whatever."

Carlson added that every class is a learning process. His experience has been humbling.

"It's a motivational thing for me to see if I can work myself up to a higher belt," he said. "I'm concentrating on my next belt. I've got to build a little more confidence and technique."

"He's taking positive steps," Kidd said.

But no matter what step of the ladder Carlson is on, he is headed in the right direction.

"I don't want to become lethargic," he said. "I hope to get a black belt by the time I'm 70."