

NORTH

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## Expert Conveys Values To Youngsters

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Of the Post-Dispatch

David Cloud of Ladue has been singing the praises of karate ever since he first studied the art while serving in the armed forces in Okinawa in 1966.

In the Vietnam War, Cloud flew a C-130 Hercules transport plane, airlifting soldiers in and out of combat zones. Cloud saw a lot of suffering and death, and it angered him, he said.

"I needed some way to control my stress and anxiety and I found it in shorin-ryu karate," said Cloud, 47. "Someone suggested I join a karate class — and once I started going, I went every day."

Most of his classmates were Japanese; there were few servicemen in the karate class, and Cloud was the only black man, he said.

"I was so intent on learning it, I soon had the highest rank in the class," he said. "That meant I sometimes was asked to take over the class."

This forced him to learn Japanese, said Cloud, laughing at the irony of a black American teaching karate to Japanese men.

By learning karate, Cloud said he also learned how to "redirect his energies."

He had had trouble "dealing with the fact that people were dying all around me —

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ABOVE: Karate *Sensei*, or instructor, David Cloud discussing the virtues of concentration with a group of young martial arts students. BELOW: Assistant instructor Julie Speth getting physical with young students in the beginners' group at the Mid-County YMCA.

## Karate

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karate taught me how to handle the things that upset me," he said.

Cloud benefited so greatly from learning karate that when he returned home to Webster Groves in 1970, and "saw kids on the street with nothing to do trying to be tough," he decided others could profit from what he had learned.

He has taught karate for nearly 23 years now, but continues to be amazed at the results it can bring to someone's life, he said. The 140 students enrolled in the thrice-weekly classes he teaches at Mid-County YMCA range in age from 4 to mid-60s, but the results are

"Instead, it lets others know you're in control of yourself, and that you're redirecting hostilities."

Cloud has taught these principles to a lot of folks — in 23 years he has had more than 4,700 students, "18 of whom have gone all the way to becoming black belts and 50 who are brown belts," he said.

Back in 1970, Cloud tacked signs to trees and otherwise put out the word that he was teaching free karate lessons in his grandmother's back yard.

In quick succession, 90 students of all ages began arriving for the lessons, and it was soon apparent he needed a better spot to hold class, Cloud said. A local television program that focused briefly on Cloud's predicament prompted offers from a wide variety of sources, he said. Cloud chose the Webster Groves YMCA and taught

and transportation departments at Christian Northeast and Christian Northwest hospitals.

But on Wednesday and Friday evenings, and Saturday mornings, he's at the Y teaching kids and adults to "turn negative things in their lives into positive things, through karate," he said.

When kids study the art, their self-esteem grows and, consequently, their grades generally go up, he said. More than just learning the karate moves, they also learn things like "paying attention, and listening to their parents," Cloud said. "A lot of parents come to watch every class — they love this program."

Among the parents who like the program is Post-Dispatch columnist Bill McClellan, whose son Jack, 5, started taking karate lessons about a month ago.

inspires his students, even the ones, and keeps them all enthralled about learning."

McClellan said Cloud's students "have the option to progress as fast as they want to — he works each one at their own speed."

McClellan is pleased that "getting the basics" of karate creates an atmosphere somewhat like "boot camp."

Cloud teaches students things like "arranging their shoes in straight lines, and listening to their mother and father, but while they're learning they're also having fun," he said.

Sharon Clark, an assistant at Mid-County who sells the T-shirts that the students wear, believes the program "is an excellent role model" for the students.