

Aboriginal black belt giving the gift of discipline

EAST VANCOUVER: Karate club offers free lessons during school year

BY ELAINE O'CONNOR
STAFF REPORTER

Thirty years ago, Calvin Helin was a Tsimshian Nation youth sent from his Lax Kw'alaams community north of Prince Rupert to further his education.

Today, the Richmond resident is a lawyer, CEO, writer and one of B.C.'s top aboriginal business leaders.

He's gone just about as far as he can go.

But he learned his most important lessons not in school, but in a dojo.

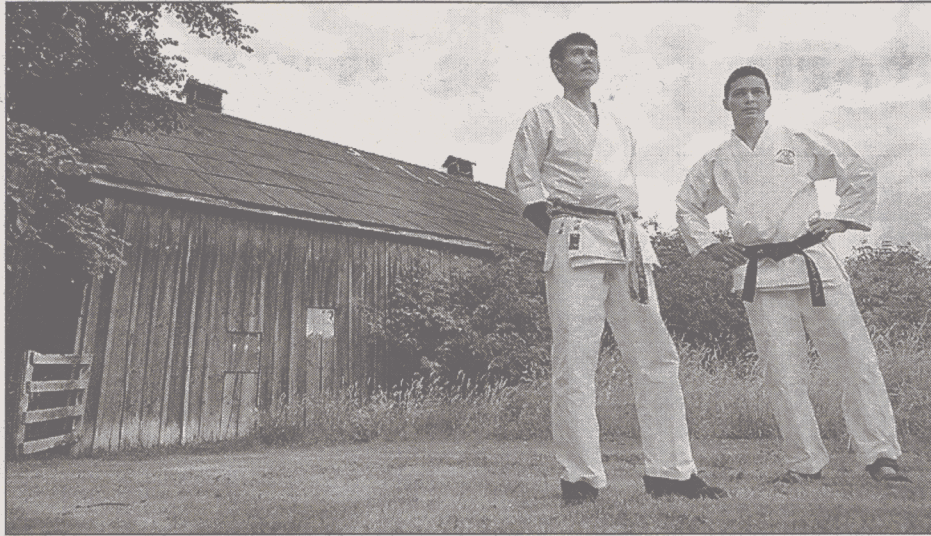
Helin discovered Goju-Ryu karate at 14 and began studying under Sensei Toshiaki Nomada. He credits the practice for his success.

"It gives you discipline. I found it to be really valuable in achieving other things," said Helin, a third-degree black belt.

The meaning of karate is "empty hand." But Helin didn't want aboriginal youth going empty-handed.

So three years ago he set up the Shudokan East Vancouver Aboriginal Karate Club in the gymnasium of Grandview/Quinak'uh Elementary, one of the neediest schools in the city, where close to half the students are native.

Together with Nomada and fellow Tsimshi-



Sensei Toshiaki Nomada (left) and Calvin Helin are karate instructors at Shudokan Karate that operates from a 100-year-old barn in Delta. RIC ERNST — THE PROVINCE

an Nation black belt Brenda Camfferman, he offers free weekly lessons during the school year for kids five and up.

The aim is to have youth take the "complete focus" they learn in karate and "apply it to school work or other sports," said Helin, CEO of Eagle Group of Companies.

The classes are also inspirational.

"I've had a few students identify with me because being aboriginal plus a woman in

karate it's kind of a challenge," Camfferman said.

Nomada, a fourth-degree dan black belt who has been practicing for more than 40 years, said the club lets him connect with the younger generation and pass on his skills.

"I think we can give them more confidence," Nomada said.

It's working for neighbourhood children like Conor McIlwrath. After two years of

classes, the eight-year-old has earned his orange belt and a hefty dose of self-reliance.

"I just loved it so much because it teaches self-defence. Ever since I joined I felt it was my dream and destiny to become a karate master," said the Grade 3 Queen Victoria student, adding, "It helps me focus a bit more."

Grade 5 Grandview student Kenneth Kadutuan said he's glad that, along with self-defence, he's learned "breathing to calm you down."

Parents are supportive. In a testimonial on the club's website, parent Crystal Woods said it's given her daughter and other aboriginal kids, "the opportunity to find discipline and structure with a touch of culture somewhat like our own [respect being the key]."

For kids with the best attendance and attitudes there is a "Karate Kid of the Year" award that sees youths receive donated computers.

Classes just wrapped up for the summer in June. Next year, the club plans to bring over Japanese masters and to hold tournaments. Eventually, Helin aims to develop a team of inner-city youth to compete in tournaments and hopes one day to take a few students to Japan.

"We have students with very good potential," Helin said. "What we are trying to do is provide role models."

For more information or to donate computers visit www.shudokan.ca.

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