

Aurora karate teacher makes the grade with grandmasters



By Jeff Doner

For the past 29 years, Aurora resident Tim Wakefield has trained hard and worked toward honing his craft in Shaolin Kempo karate.

The years of dedication and hard work paid off once again as Wakefield was recently graded and awarded with an eighth degree black belt by the International Kempo Council of Grandmasters (IKCG) at an event in Marlborough, Massachusetts.

'It was a very intimidating test as well because I was in front of a panel of basically 10 Grandmasters ? all tenth degree black belts ? and when I told the IKCG guys that I wanted to get back to my roots and get in line with the original Kempo, I never expected that I would be face to face with some of the guys connected to the original roots,' Wakefield said.

'One of the first people to bring Shaolin Kempo Karate to the United States east coast was Sr. Grandmaster George Pesare, and some of his students are famous people in martial arts circles and I was face to face with them.'

Wakefield, who has also been teaching at Black Belt Martial Arts in Aurora since 1994, said he studied a different branch of Shaolin Kempo for years, but wanted to get back to the original line that was established in the 1970's by Grandmaster Villari.

'That's why I decided to go down to this event. While I was there, they tested me for an eighth degree black belt, which is a fairly rare thing, you don't see too many of those guys kicking around, so I was a little surprised when they asked me to test. As far as the International Kempo Council of Grandmasters is concerned, that makes me their highest ranking guy in Ontario, if not Canada.'

Wakefield said it was one of the most intimidating tests he has faced thus far in his 29 years as a student of Shaolin Kempo.

'When they're looking at eighth band, they're saying, 'we know you can punch and kick and we know you've got your basics down, what we're looking for now is prove to us that your skills and knowledge are ready for eighth band, you have 10 minutes, go.' I literally had 10 minutes to prove what I could do. I don't know any harder test than that.'

At the age of 40, Wakefield is also a fifth degree black belt in laido (Japanese sword arts) and will be challenging for his sixth degree black belt in that field in August. He said that test will be in front of a panel of seven judges who are flown over from Japan just to grade the event. He will then have six minutes to show his skills and that he is worthy of a belt upgrade.

Wakefield offers classes in Shaolin Kempo, laido, kobudo (the practice of old style Okinawan weapons) and Jodo (the traditional samurai art of the stick) to roughly 200 students.

Even with all his experience, Wakefield was quick to admit his recent eighth degree grading has been the most memorable highlight thus far.

'Eighth belt was one of those goals I set for myself that I never really knew when it was going to happen and you always look up at the guys with the eighth, ninth and tenth degree black belts and you go, 'jeez, I wonder if I'm ever going to see that many stripes on me?' Fortunately it has happened; I woke up Monday and I got back from my trip and I went, 'I'm one of those guys,' he said.

'It was very exciting and motivating. It's so far the pinnacle of my career ? it will only be surpassed if I make it to nine,' he said with a laugh.