



**FIND YOUR CENTER**  
Sensei Doug Thornton leads an adult class at Gallop's in a kata, or dance-like fighting routine, with the pretty name "Lady Crane."

# Kickin' It Karate Style

The Martial Arts Are a Workout for the Mind, Body and Spirit **By Mary Dunkelberger**

**H**ere's what I knew about karate before my first lesson: Everybody has heard of it, it's viewed with a certain "Asian mysticism," and all are awed by the friend who has the black belt. From what I could see watching the class before mine, karate seemed pretty intense – heavy on the kicks, chops, bowing and honor.

I wanted to give it a try. I figured if third-graders can do it, why can't I? My first session at Gallop's Family Center was an "all belt" lesson. Nine-tenths of the class was no more than 4 feet tall, and all had white and yellow belts (the first two levels). Being a 5-foot, 6-inch, 16-year-old no-belt, I was the odd girl out. But my instructors were very accommodating and good-natured; I had an assistant instructor who guided me through the basics, showing me some simple kicks and punches and a dance-like fighting routine called a kata.

"You learn all you need to know for a white belt within your first class," said dojo owner Professor Gallop Franklin, owner of Gallop's Family Center. But because testing is held once every three months, I am (sadly) still beltless.

Based on my first session, karate was way easier than I expected. Then I took an adult class. If you are an adult interested in karate,

be ready for a total mind and body workout. The class begins with a mind-boggling number of jumping jacks, pushups, karate sit-ups and leg lifts. And that's just the warm-up. The class then moved into learning and practicing kicks, punches, katas and self-defense techniques. (I was all about the nunchucks.) All the while, you're learning balance and body control, as well as fighting skills – something no Stairmaster can do for you.

Karate can seem difficult, but mostly it is just fun. After a month of lessons, I am surprised by what I can do. Karate is practically limitless in its appeal – current students at Gallop's range in age from 2 to 70, said Franklin, so just about anyone can do it – and do it well, with practice.

Karate also is a great family activity. Not only does it teach discipline and respect, it's a fun workout and skill that parents and children can take part in together. (However, Franklin warns that the regimen imposed by the dojo only works when parents are willing to impose some discipline at home.) In a twist on the "kids eat free" specials offered by restaurants, at Gallop's, when a child is signed up for his or her first contract, a parent gets to take lessons with the child for free.

You can start anytime, classes are offered daily, and each workout lasts 45 minutes. (Except for the Little Ninjas classes for the youngest students – they're 20 minutes. It's an attention span thing.) At Gallop's, monthly tuition is based on the number of classes you want to take per week – \$55 for one a week, \$75 for two and \$130 for unlimited classes. Required uniforms and T-shirts can be purchased on site.

I highly recommend karate or any other martial art. You will find yourself focusing your center and strengthening your spirit while pushing your body and learning some killer moves from an ancient art. If you still are not convinced, heed Franklin's advice: "Just try one class." Free self-defense classes are offered on the first Saturday of every month from 9:45 to 10:30 a.m. ■

## NOW IT'S YOUR TURN

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