

YMCA hosts annual taekwondo exhibition



Bethany Joy Hess, who earned a black belt, prepares to break a board held by Master Steve Kirby.

Twelve earning black belts honored

BY GREG CALDWELL
Correspondent

The gymnasium at the Lancaster YMCA was filled with broken cinder blocks and boards as part of the second annual taekwondo exhibition Saturday night.

Various demonstrations of forms, kicks and breaks were on display, as well as the coronation of 12 new Black Belts of various ages in the event witnessed by 200 plus parents, community members and stu-

dents in the program currently held at six YMCA locations.

The show included 100 students participating in the demo and a variety of high-level Black Belt instructors.

Master Steve Kirby is in charge of the program. Kirby, a fifth-degree Black Belt who is currently testing for the sixth-degree classification next year in Korea, explained to the attending crowd the various moves and training required for each student to progress through the belts.



Master Steve Kirby, holds a board for Quinn Harvey to break, while Collin Meckley waits his turn. Both Harvey and Meckley earned black belts.



Jim Oplinger broke a cinder block using his forearm.

"Taekwondo is the Korean style of martial arts," Kirby said. "It is the Korean national sport and is part of the Olympics. It also is the most exciting form of personal expression among the martial arts."

Two highlights of the evening were the expertise of Gus Acuascut and the motorcycle trick. Acuascut, a second-degree Black Belt who is testing for a third degree he will receive next year in Korea, broke three cinder blocks with his hand.

He was unsuccessful on his try of five blocks, which Kirby said was due to them being damp. A fellow black belt, Jim Oplinger, broke one cinder block using his forearm.

The motorcycle trick, which excited the crowd, used a 2006 Harley-Davidson soft tail belonging to one of the adult students. During the trick, one of the newly awarded black belts, Jim Long, 15, of the Anville-Cleona School District, jumped over the stationary bike and kicked out with his

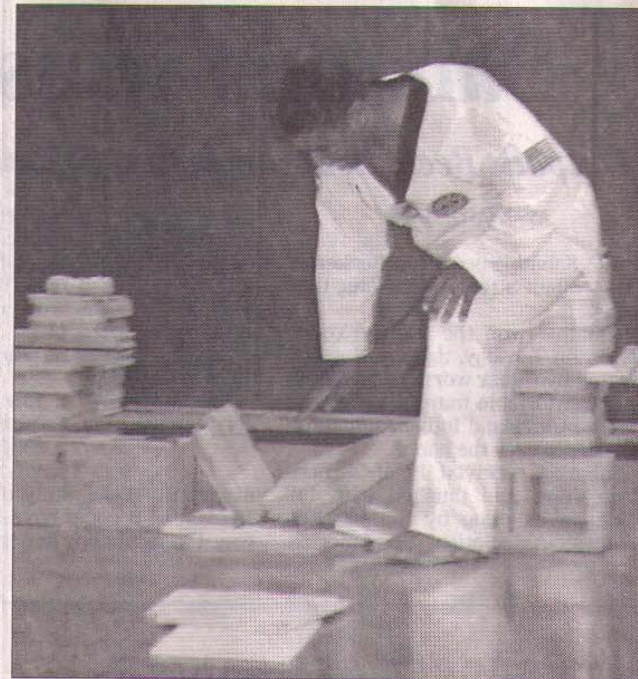
legs, shattering boards held in the air. Two other students also jumped over the bike as part of the trick. "I was not sure how tall the bike was, but I am happy how it turned out. I hope the crowd liked it," said Long, who started in the sport three years ago.

"My dad was into martial arts and told me about it. I love it because it takes a lot of mental preparation, but if you put your mind to it, you can accomplish anything," Long said.

Long's younger sister, Tabitha, 12, also earned her black belt, a crowning achievement after three and a half years of work in the sport. "I worked hard and pushed myself to get my body in shape. I was glad to get this belt as the hard work has paid off," Tabby Long said.

Kirby said those earning the black belts worked for anywhere between two and a half to three years to make it to this level.

During Saturday's ceremony, the students were honored,



Greg Caldwell / photos

During the demonstration, Gus Acuascut broke three cinder blocks with his hand.

taking off their red belts and holding them at their sides while other students tied the new belt around their waists.

"It is an awesome accomplishment to earn a black belt and the YMCA is so proud of all the hard work they put in to accomplish this goal," Tom Baughman, Associate Executive Director of the Lancaster YMCA said. "It is great to see a YMCA program touch so many kids, adults and families."

The 12 students who were in the first Dan Class, or black belt class, were: John Harvey, Dorden Bivings, Bethany Joy Hess, Timothy and Tabitha Long, Kyle Lefever, Collin Meckley, Tyler Griffin, Rachel Freeman, Lisa Clement, Samuel Betancourt, and Quinn Harvey.

Freeman, 10, said she was excited to earn her black belt. "It was really hard to get to this level. There are a lot of kicks and breaks, and I got nervous during the demonstration."

Another trick involved jumping in the air over two students, who were each holding boards, and shattering the wood without stepping on the

prone students. Each trick brought a cheer and excitement from the crowd.

The taekwondo program is held in schools throughout Lancaster County and in their after-school programs.

Kirby's wife Judith, a first degree black belt, deals directly with all the YMCA facilities to keep the program going strong.

Judith and Steve have two sons, Scott and Chris, who are also black belts in taekwondo. Chris was one of the helpers at Saturday's event. There are three other instructors in the program.

Anyone interested in joining the taekwondo program can call Judith Kirby at 717-252-2824 or check the Web site www.taekwondonetwork.com.

"To the YMCA, this program is more than just breaking boards and bricks. It is character development," Baughman said. "The positive changes that the kids and parents are seeing are testimony to the spirit, mind and body remaining in balance to achieve complete wellness."