

Training for youth. The Wells have started several innovative programs to train young students. The Tiny Tigers program is for children ages four to six years. Tiny Tigers classes are offered in five different locations around central Iowa. "We want to give the children the base to transition into a regular TaeKwon Do class," said Tiny Tigers instructor Tamera Bice.

The classes are 30 minutes long versus one hour for older students, to accommodate shorter attention spans. There is one main instructor, with several assistants to keep the younger students focused on their kicks and punches. Instructors stress safety, discipline, and respect. They also teach "Stranger Danger" principles.

The Wells also started a graduated junior black belt program for youth who have not yet reached the age of 12. They test along with adults and teens for black belts, but are judged by the skills and challenges appropriate for their age group. They earn "junior" black belts, which are black with a colored stripe in the center to signify the level of belt. When they reach the age of 13 they can test for a standard temporary black belt.

The Wells also encourage children to get good grades by awarding academic patches if they have good report cards. They have school teachers recommend children for promotion in TaeKwon Do based on their behavior and contributions at school.

Involve the Black Belts. The Wells have a large contingent of active black belts. The black belts teach classes at branch schools, and train at Martial Arts America under Master Don Wells' instruction. They help organize testing, tournaments, and demonstrations. They also participate in many other activities, such as picnics, fundraising events, the foundation, and scholarship fund.

The Wells believe that keeping students involved in teaching and training is key to keeping them involved after they earn a black belt. They are also very appreciative of the black belts' contributions to their students. "I know if I ever need anything, the black belts will be there to help," said Master Don Wells.

A balanced life. Although the Wells spend countless hours teaching at their school, attending tournaments with students, and seeing to the financial and business matters that go with operating a martial arts school, they also find time for

outside interests.

Several years ago they moved to an acreage in the country. The property came with 12 geese, seven cats, two dogs, and three race horses. Fortunately, they both love animals, and still have four cats and two dogs.

Bonnie Wells enjoys knitting and sewing, but her favorite pastime is playing with her 12 grandchildren. She had her twin grandsons breaking boards by the time they could walk.

Mr. Wells also collects weapons and enjoys attending gun shows.

They are very happy with the way their lives have turned out through TaeKwon Do.

Plans for the Future

"We cannot be satisfied to just maintain our capabilities in TaeKwon Do, but need to constantly be looking for ways we can become better," said Bonnie Wells. "If TaeKwon Do is an art and not just a sport, there will always be areas for you to improve."

Master Don Wells has no plans to slow down. He says, "We plan to continue what we are doing now, and to have even more branch locations in the future." **T&D**

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* Photos by Chris Byerly. All other photos by Mark Bassett.

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