

## OUR SCOTTSDALE

# School is more than black belts

Karate-center's after-school events keep kids busy

On the surface, Southwest Center for the Martial Arts is what one might expect: A karate program. Trophies from local, state and national competitions line shelves on walls with photos of winners enrolled in the after-school program.

Inside the Scottsdale Airpark center, however, it's apparent there's far more to this nonprofit organization than its cornerstone activity and the accolades students have amassed.

Using karate as a form of discipline and way to get and keep the interest of children 5 and older, the center offers games, card playing and various activities beyond martial arts. Those who behave properly earn treats and can work their way up to coveted black-belt status.

Recognition is important for self-esteem and winning competitions are encouraged, but children remain the key to Richard and Nancy Poage, who opened the center 11 years ago to give parents an after-school option for their children.

The center has a pick-up service and offers an alternative to day care or for children whose parents are still at work after school. Kids from 22 schools in the Scottsdale and Paradise Valley unified school



HI-YUH:

Nine-year-old Tasha Denick takes karate exercises at Southwest Center for the Martial Arts.

JULIO JIMENEZ, TRIBUNE

districts participate.

"When our son Richard did it, there were kids who had parents who couldn't afford the time or money to let their kids participate," said Nancy Poage, center general manager. "We keep it affordable and are always looking for sponsors to help us defray costs. But, it's all about the kids and what can we give them."

The after-school program costs \$75 a week. It includes pick-up, a snack and any activities the center offers. Among them are Frisbee dodge ball, chess, air hockey, fuzz ball, self-defense and movies. Parents usually pick up their children around 6 to 6:30 p.m.

Jerry Frost, a Scottsdale resident whose 7-year-old daughter, Sofia Sarmiento, is involved in the program, likes the results.

"I've never seen her so excited about something," Frost said. "She's shy to perform around a group of



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people, but not around her mom and me. She shows us the moves she's learned and is proud of them. She's learning self-confidence and having a good time doing it."

Learning includes an EZ Defense for Children program discussing stranger danger and anti-abduction strategies for kids in kindergarten through sixth grade. There's also a spring break fun camp, summer camps with field trips and a host of other activities.

Spring break and summer camps are \$150 a week. Children usually spend 12 hours — 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. — at the center.

Before getting involved with any activities, children must show that they've finished homework for the evening.

"This has become a second home for a lot of families," said Dick Poage, center president. "When we have family classes, we go out for pizza afterward and to interact."

Richard Poage, the couple's 20-year-old son, has become an instructor at the center. "I can see how it benefits in their behavior," he said. "I talk with parents about the benefits this has at home and in school. Parents tell me that they see a big change in their child's attitude at home and grades are getting better. We're teaching karate, but we're working with discipline."

To learn more about the center, call (480) 443-2550.

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