

NEWS

KICKING PAST BARRIERS



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News Editor

In celebration of National Down Syndrome month, DeKalb County Parks and Recreation set up a special needs martial arts program for disabled students to provide a goal for personal fitness.

Lakeside graduate of 1995 Wallace Taylor adopted the county's special needs program into his own company, the Tucker Taekwondo Center, a world-class training facility for athletes. His center began the program at the start of the year and has expanded it ever since.

The program teaches many students with disabilities ranging from ADHD, Crohn's Disease, Down Syndrome, Tourettes Syndrome, visual impairment and cerebral palsy. Students diagnosed with these disabilities may have short attention spans, attitude problems and various degrees of physical impairment. Every Saturday students meet and learn basic movements by stretching and practicing the fundamental punches and kicks of Taekwondo. They also exercise by sparring with each other using their skills.



Photos by Suchi Patton

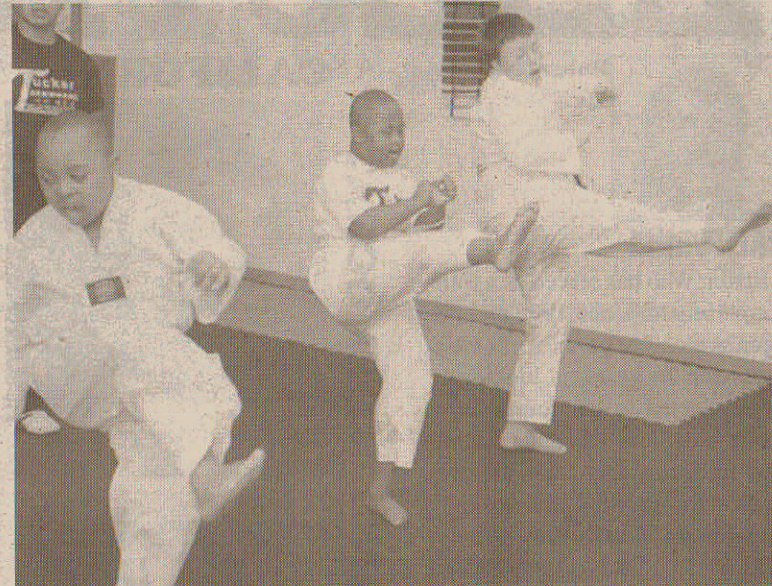
"The most difficult thing [to adjust to] is the varied levels of functionality and communicating can be difficult," Taylor said.

Myles Henderson, whose older sister Stephanie is a sophomore at Lakeside, is enrolled of the Tucker Center's special needs program and a student at Oak Grove Elementary School.

Myles has Down Syndrome.

"Sometimes [Myles] doesn't understand things when I'm trying to be nice to him, but they're no different than regular children. They just have a delay," said Stephanie.

"Modifying my style of teaching to meet my students' needs is at times challenging," said instructor Ana Perez, 12.



PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT: (left) Ana Perez adjusts student Matthew Palmer's posture during a private session. Palmer is diagnosed with Tourette's Syndrome and is visually impaired, but practices Taekwondo daily. His hard work has made him the most advanced athlete of the group. (right) Myles Henderson, Matthew Palmer and Nicholas Green practice their ap-chagi, or front kick, while using their balancing skills. They must also keep their hands up in self-defense and yell for every kick.

As a devoted high school student and teacher, Perez has taught children and adults with varying degrees of learning.

"I hope that the time I spend with [the students] inside the center will positively impact everything they do, whether it is in the school

or elsewhere," said Perez.

Accredited by USA Taekwondo, Taylor plans to push his special needs program in hopes of turning it into a sport for the Georgia Special Olympics so that all his students can become great athletes and achieve their goals.