

Karate School recognized with first Hub Award

By **Sam Odrowski**

An area business that teaches self-defence, karate, and the 'art of fighting without fighting' is being recognized with a new annual award at the former Mill Street Mall.

Johanis' Karate School recently received the first Old Mill Hub Award, after a public vote was held, determining which businesses located within the hub most exemplified kindness, generosity and positive community impact.

A trophy was presented to the karate school's owners' Elyse and John Johanis by the hub's property manager and awards organizer, Marshal Bobechko last Monday.

'I'm very happy that they're part of our Old Mill Hub family,' said Bobechko. 'I am extremely excited that they're getting finally recognized, and I'm very grateful that I was given the opportunity to help.'

He said the idea for the award came about after the Town of Orangeville gave the Old Mill Hub the Arts and Culture Award for Community Impact by a Business in 2021. It got Bobechko thinking about doing something similar within the hub to help recognize the great work that those businesses do.

Previously located at 229 Broadway, behind Lucky Lime, Johanis' Karate School has been in the community for over 20 years, with the goal of creating 'peaceful warriors'.

The owners say it feels great to be recognized.

'We really want to thank Marshal,' said John. 'We didn't expect to get this and we really appreciate it. Everyone at the Old Mill Hub is so awesome.'

John, who was a karate champion in the 90s, goes by Kyoshi in the dojo, which means 'professor' in Japanese and Elyse is called Sifu, meaning 'principal.'

Johanis' Karate School is non-competitive, although before the COVID-19 pandemic they would attend a banquet and tournament through the Canadian Karate Kungfu Association, where awards were handed out each year.

A lot of parents enroll their children into karate because they want them to learn self-defence to be able to defend themselves at school, said John.

But at karate school, they teach peaceful conflict resolution, which Elyse calls 'the art of fighting without fighting.'

The teachings are centred around defence instead of offense.

'They're learning lots of blocks and evasions, that kind of stuff. We're taking the kids that come in shrunken and building their confidence so that they can leave at the end of the day with their shoulders back and head held high, able to take on a lot of things in the world.'

Before starting the karate school, Elyse had a career in social work, specializing in child protection, and utilizes her skills in psychology to help with social and character development among their students.

'I left social work, really still wanting to be a part of helping the community,' said Elyse, who also noted the karate school's

community involvement with fundraising and supporting non-profits.

?We're about the kids and the people of Orangeville [Caledon, Shelburne] and wanting to give back to them? being a presence in the community that's supportive, strong and reliable.?

Elyse is now going back to school to take a Masters of Social Work program so she can help in a more formal capacity.

She said the karate school helps encourage its students to be successful when they become adults. They run a Student of the Year program where every student who, at the end of high school, volunteers with the karate school, volunteers in the community and go for a post-secondary education, receives the award.

Some of the students have gone on to get PhDs, and become successful in a variety of careers like law enforcement, law, and psychology.

The school teaches around 200 people, from ages three to 73, said Elyse.

Teaching six feet apart has always been commonplace at karate schools since participants need to be spaced out to not accidentally kick or hit one another, so Elyse and John were able to quickly adapt their services through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Elyse said the karate school has an incredible student body that's helped them get through the past two turbulent years with openings, closures, and restrictions.

Through the summer, camps have been operated at the Old Mill Hub where Johanis' Karate School has teamed up with businesses offering pottery and art classes to kids to make for a more fulsome experience.

?It just adds value to camp because it's more activities for them to do,? said Elyse.

She and John both said they're incredibly thankful to all the parents who enroll their children in their karate school and they're looking forward to making the Old Mill Hub they're permanent home.

Johanis' Karate School marked it's one year anniversary at the hub this July.