

## Retiree finds fitness and challenge in martial arts

By Thelma Guerrero-Huston

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Move over, Ralph Macchio. There's a new karate kid in town.

At age 71, Nick Zimmerman is becoming a karate sensation in Salem.

"I was never very good at sports, but this is something that I can participate in and get better at it," he said. "In the process, I get to be physically fit."

A retired Air Force captain, meteorologist and former systems analyst with the Oregon Lottery, Zimmerman never had tried his hand at martial arts.

He became interested in the Japanese-style combat form more than five years ago after he began taking his grandson, Michael Zimmerman, 12, to karate lessons at Steele's Karate & Boxing on High Street NE.

John Olivera, the karate school's owner, called the elder Zimmerman a great man who lends a helping hand to other students.

"He's done a lot for our clients, helping them with information about things like retirement and being a role model," Olivera said. "He recently was voted Outstanding Student of the Year for 2009-10 for being the best improved student."

Since Zimmerman began taking karate classes, his wife, Lindy Zimmerman, has seen a significant change in her husband.

"It's increased his self-confidence and his physical agility," the wife said. "He now does things around the house that I think he wouldn't be able to do otherwise, like climbing ladders and maintaining good physical shape."

Zimmerman's confidence is at a level where he's comfortable competing in karate tournaments three or four times per year.

"I'm the oldest competitor in the entire NW Japan Karate Federation," he said.



**Thomas Patterson | Statesman Journal**  
Nick Zimmerman, 71, receives a lesson from sensei John Olivera at Steele's Karate and Boxing.

### More information

What: Steele's Karate & Boxing

Where: 860 High St. NE, Salem

Call: (503) 391-4634

Online: [www.steeleskarate.com](http://www.steeleskarate.com)

He also is the most senior student at Steele's Karate & Boxing.

And he's working his way up the karate belt system. He currently holds a high green belt and is training to receive a brown belt, a level about halfway up the belt ladder.

His goal is the much-coveted black belt, one that is not easily attained.

"It gets harder and harder," Zimmerman said. "But when I get there, it will be like the equivalent of a three- or four-star general."

Even if he doesn't make it to the black-belt level, Zimmerman isn't going to lose sleep over it.

"It's a way to participate in a sports event that I can improve myself in, and I don't have to worry about sitting the bench all the time," he said. "My goal is to improve in karate and in the process keep myself physically fit and mentally challenged."

Why the mental challenge?

"Because at my level, all the commands are given in Japanese," he said, "so I have to memorize the Japanese words for stances, strikes, kicks, punches and blocks."

He credits his ability to have reached his current level in karate to Olivera.

"He works hard to help me prepare for every belt test, and in the process helps me stay in shape," he said.

tguerrer@StatesmanJournal.com or (503) 399-6815