

# BLACK BELT®

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### BLACK BELT TIMES



Devin Fernandez

#### Indomitable Spirit

## THIRD EYE INSIGHT OFFERS TRAINING FOR THE BLIND

When Devin Fernandez, 54, was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa, a debilitating disease that would eventually rob him of his sight, he drew on his martial arts practice to steady him for the path ahead. Although he was facing blindness, he was not lacking in vision. Unwilling to sacrifice his martial arts practice and active lifestyle, he set on the idea of creating a gathering place for other blind and visually impaired adults and children to engage in physical fitness activities.

Along with his sister, Kim Fernandez, he created a non-profit organization, called Third Eye Insight in May 2010. The physical -fitness program -- the first of its kind in Long Island, N.Y. --is housed within the Long Island Ninjutsu Center in West Islip. It offers weekend classes in martial arts/self defense, yoga and meditation to visually-impaired people ages 10-70.

Fernandez credits his ability to turn his vision loss into an opportunity for growth to the fact that he's stayed anchored using those same disciplines. A practitioner of ninpo ninjutsu for more than 11 years, he holds a shodan in the art and a black belt in kokusai jujutsu renmei.

Fernandez coaches his blind students to hone their four senses so they can face better odds when they confront opponents on the street. Among other things, they learn how to use their sense of hearing to discern relevant background noise and their sense of smell to determine the location of other people in reference to their own body.

The ninpo expert admits that he met a worthy opponent in blindness. Yet, instead of folding up his mat and going home, he channeled his energies into a path of service. He knew that the lessons gleaned from his years of practice could continue to aid him on a personal level as he sparred with one of the biggest hurdles a human being can face. He acknowledged that a greater potential existed to reach out to an underserved population and help them push their physical, emotional and spiritual boundaries.

To that end, Fernandez's long-term goal for Third Eye Insight is to build a facility that offers additional fitness activities such as swimming, rock climbing and weight training – thus providing even more routes to self-discovery for himself, and others. [www.thirdeyeinsight.org](http://www.thirdeyeinsight.org)

–Kathleen Finn

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