

Martial arts the Kim Soo way

When Kim Soo first arrived in the Houston twenty years ago, he had only \$100 to his name. Now he has the largest karate organization in the southwest United States.

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The ultimate in college admissions.

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The earlier, the better.

If Johnny is having a hard time reading in school, the problem could be his eyes. Pediatric optometrists say that early examinations can lead to quicker improvements and more assured outcomes.

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Karate is big business for UH instructor.

For Grandmaster Kim Soo, the martial arts is a way of life, not a bag of tricks. If you want to break bricks or boards, Kim advises you to get a hammer

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You can barely see the panelled walls in Grandmaster Kim's office at his karate studio in Spring Branch. They are covered with pictures, plaques, newspaper clippings, certificates, trophies and medals. The office decor, an incredible display of achievement, success and victory, is hardly what you would expect from a man who describes his youthful self growing up in South Korea as bashful with low self-esteem.

That was before he discovered the martial arts at age 11. Since then Kim Pyung Soo, instructor of martial arts at UH since 1974 and world-renowned karate expert, has established the largest karate organization in the southwest United States and has been promoted to ninth-degree black belt, the highest rank in the martial arts, placing him among only 50 people at that level in the world. He is the only person in Texas and only among 10 people in the United States with that rank.

But Kim has overcome much to get where he is today.

As a child growing up in Seoul, South Korea, Kim had to deal with a lot of family conflict. Also, because he skipped one grade in elementary school, Kim was in a class with boys older and bigger who enjoyed "beating up" on him. "I lost all of my confidence and my school grades dropped," Kim recalled.

After deciding he had had enough, Kim began daily intensive karate training, and over two years later, was awarded a black belt.

After receiving a degree in Russian languages at the University of Seoul and



spending some time in the military teaching the martial arts, Kim decided it was time to come to America. He had developed his own system of martial arts training called Cha Yon Ryu, "The Natural Way," which incorporates elements from several Oriental fighting and training techniques, including Korean tae kwon do, Japanese karate and Chinese kung fu, and felt he did not have the freedom to continue developing this system without interference from other martial arts teachers in the Orient.

In 1968, Kim came to Houston with only \$100 in his pocket, and a dream to

open his own karate studio. He chose Houston because there was not an already established karate school in the area and he relished the thought of being a pioneer. "All I really had was my burning desire," he says.

That was twenty years ago. Today, Kim has dojangs (training halls) in downtown, Spring Branch, the Woodlands and Kingwood. Other Texas Cha Yon Ryu dojangs are now operating in Clear Lake, Baytown, Rosenberg, Kountze, College Station, Dallas, San Antonio, Austin, Eastland, Aldine, Tomball and Odessa. He also boasts out-of-state locations and two in Mexico. His current and former students number over 35,000.

Kim modestly attributes his success to hard work, and the fact that karate "is my life, not my business."

In honor of the 20th anniversary of the founding of Cha Yon Ryu International Martial Arts Association, Kim was honored by Houston Mayor Kathryn J. Whitmire, who proclaimed January 16, 1988, as "Grandmaster Kim Soo Day" in Houston.

To those who might be interested in trying their hand at the martial arts, Kim gives this advice: "Style doesn't make the man. Man makes the style. It is important to remember that the martial arts are a way of life, not a way to impress or bully people."

And to students who ask him to teach them how to break bricks or boards, Kim hands them a hammer.

—T.H.