

# **OKINAWA KENPO KARATE ACADEMY**

## **BLACK BELT GRADUATES**

### **December 2024**

**West Deptford**

**Pitman**



**Mullica Hill**

**Swedesboro**

**Hanshi Ronald Dargan**  
Sensei Amanda Grogan  
Sensei Ryan Sickles  
Sensei Frances Coakley  
Sensei TJ Coakley

## Black Belt Oath

I accept with honor and privilege the Black Belt in the martial arts and do hereby swear to uphold the standards of Honesty, Integrity, Courtesy, High Moral Code, and Indomitable Spirit. I sincerely pledge, to honor my instructors and school with loyalty and support, to value and carry on the martial arts tradition, with respect and dignity. I further pledge with humility and gratitude, to continue my mental, physical, and spiritual growth to the highest level, to lead by example, and to share what I have learned with others.

## "I Am a Martial Artist"

I am a martial artist.  
I see through different eyes  
I see a bigger picture  
when others see gray skies.

Though many can't conceive it,  
I stand ... facing the wind.  
My bravery, not from fighting,  
but from my strength within.

I am a martial artist.  
I'll walk the extra mile.  
Not because I have to,  
but because it's worth my while

I know that I am different,  
when I stand on a crowded street.  
I know the fullness of winning,  
I've tasted the cup of defeat.

I am a martial artist.  
They say I walk with ease.  
Though trained for bodily harm,  
my intentions are for peace.

The world may come and go,  
but a different path I'll choose.  
A path I will not stray from,  
no matter, win or lose.

—KAREN EDEN



## Hanshi Ron Dargan 9<sup>th</sup> Degree Black Belt

Leading Martial Arts into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Hanshi Dargan has over 40+ years' experience as an educator, successful competitor, and an inspiring martial artist. He has been a successful competitor across the nation and is also an accomplished body builder, tennis, and pickleball player. Hanshi Dargan continues to train future leaders with his Instructor Training and Leadership Program.

- 1970.75 Student, See Kin Do American Karate
- 1978 Graduated Marine Corps. Boot Camp with honors
- 1980 Trained with 10<sup>th</sup> degree Grand Master Odo
- 1980 Married Carolyn E. Harris, Philadelphia, PA.
- 1983-84 Hawaii State Top Black Belt in Kata, Weapons, and Fighting
- 1984 Member, Hawaii Karate Team World Cup Tournament, Glendale, CA.
- 1984 Hawaii State Competitor of the Year
- 1986.87 Marine Corps.' Hand to Hand Combat Instructor, Parris Island, SC.
- 1988.89 Marine Corps.' Hand to Hand Combat Instructor, Okinawa, Japan
- 1992.93 Marine Corps.' Hand to Hand Combat Instructor, Quantico, VA.
- 1994-98 Chief Instructor, Top Competitor, Black Belt Division, Okinawa, Japan
- 1997 Mr. Torii Station Body Building Champion, Okinawa, Japan
- 1998 Mr. Far East Overall Body Building Champion, Okinawa, Japan
- 1999-02 Grand Champion, Valentine Day Classic, Halloween Classic, NC Nationals
- 2000 Hall of Fame World Karate Union, Pocono's PA.
- 2002 Black Belt Marine Corps. Martial Arts Program
- 2002 Coach Good Will Games, Karate Championship, Mexico
- 2003 Retired Marine Corps. Veteran, 25 years Master Sergeant
- 2003 Chief Instructor, West Deptford, NJ.
- 2004 Hall of Fame, American Martial Arts
- 2007-13 Philadelphia Eagles Security
- 2009 UMAA Hall of Fame Master Instructor of the Year
- 2009-11 Master's Tennis Championship, Gloucester County
- 2012 USTA National Championship, Tennessee
- 2013-14 July 4<sup>th</sup>, Promotion, 9<sup>th</sup> Degree Black Belt, Promotion to Hanshi
- 2014 USTA National Championship, Arizona
- 2015 VITA SAANA BITMA Award. Outstanding selfless contributions.
- 2019 1<sup>st</sup> Pickleball Tournament, St. Patty's Day, 3<sup>rd</sup> w/ Troy Clemmer
- 2020 Total Turf Father's Day Pickleball Mixed Doubles, 1<sup>st</sup> w/ Rene Clemmer
- 2021 Green Acres Advanced Mixed Pickleball, 1<sup>st</sup> w/ Rene Clemmer
- 2022 Philadelphia Open Mixed Pickleball Tournament, 1<sup>st</sup> w/ Sue Debbs
- 2023 Deptford Winter Open Pickleball Tournament, 1<sup>st</sup> w/ Ileana Velez
- 2023 Atlantic City Pickleball Champion, Men's Singles, (Golden Ticket)
- 2023 Atlantic City Pickleball Champion Men's Doubles, Stu Potter (Golden Ticket)
- 2023 Starred in a movie as Lobby Guard # 1. ( Call Her King )
- 2024 Started in 2<sup>nd</sup> Movie as Prison Guard: Godfather of Fentinayl
- 2024 Biofreeze Pickleball National Champion 4.5 60 -64. Mesa Arizona

Hanshi Dargan along with Sensei Sickles, Sensei Grogan, Sensei Fran Coakley, Sensei TJ Coakley and the OKKA Senior Instructors wish to congratulate all of our Black Belt Graduates! We are proud to welcome you to the ranks and look forward to training with you in the years to come as you continue on your path of Black Belt Excellence.

# **Black Belt Graduates**

## **December 2024**

<b>Name</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Rank</b>
<b>Jason Ager</b>	<b>Pitman</b>	<b>Nidan</b>
<b>Liam Ager</b>	<b>Pitman</b>	<b>Nidan</b>
<b>Declan Antoshka</b>	<b>West Deptford</b>	<b>Shodan</b>
<b>Silas Burke</b>	<b>West Deptford</b>	<b>Nidan</b>
<b>Gabriella Cacia</b>	<b>Swedesboro</b>	<b>Shodan</b>
<b>Tristan Clark</b>	<b>Pitman</b>	<b>Nidan</b>
<b>Rori Danhires</b>	<b>Swedesboro</b>	<b>Shodan</b>
<b>Jesus Diaz</b>	<b>Swedesboro</b>	<b>Shodan</b>
<b>Erin Doyle</b>	<b>Mullica Hill</b>	<b>Yondan</b>
<b>Claire Evans</b>	<b>Swedesboro</b>	<b>Shodan</b>
<b>Ella Everwine</b>	<b>Pitman</b>	<b>Sandan</b>
<b>Amanda Garcia</b>	<b>Pitman</b>	<b>Shodan</b>
<b>Andres Garcia</b>	<b>Pitman</b>	<b>Shodan</b>
<b>Kara Gleason</b>	<b>Pitman</b>	<b>Shodan</b>
<b>Silas Hall</b>	<b>Mullica Hill</b>	<b>Shodan</b>
<b>Nathan Hall</b>	<b>Mullica Hill</b>	<b>Shodan</b>
<b>Lance Jalandoni</b>	<b>West Deptford</b>	<b>Shodan</b>
<b>Randy Kane</b>	<b>Mullica Hill</b>	<b>Yondan</b>
<b>Brendan Kane</b>	<b>Mullica Hill</b>	<b>Yondan</b>
<b>Rob Kizirian</b>	<b>Swedesboro</b>	<b>Shodan</b>
<b>Nathan Labuda</b>	<b>Swedesboro</b>	<b>Shodan</b>
<b>Mason Leo</b>	<b>Swedesboro</b>	<b>Shodan</b>
<b>Mia Luczkiewicz</b>	<b>Pitman</b>	<b>Shodan</b>
<b>Zoe Luczkiewicz</b>	<b>Pitman</b>	<b>Shodan</b>
<b>Alanna Lukasiewicz</b>	<b>Swedesboro</b>	<b>Nidan</b>
<b>Zachary Mayer</b>	<b>Swedesboro</b>	<b>Nidan</b>

<b>Bryce McDonald</b>	<b>Swedesboro</b>	<b>Shodan</b>
<b>Michael Noble</b>	<b>Pitman</b>	<b>Nidan</b>
<b>Benjamin Pezzino</b>	<b>Swedesboro</b>	<b>Nidan</b>
<b>Bianca Ponce</b>	<b>Swedesboro</b>	<b>Shodan</b>
<b>Brayden Rogers</b>	<b>Pitman</b>	<b>Shodan</b>
<b>Harman Singh</b>	<b>Mullica Hill</b>	<b>Nidan</b>
<b>Chloe Smith</b>	<b>Swedesboro</b>	<b>Shodan</b>
<b>Gabe Stankiewicz</b>	<b>West Deptford</b>	<b>Shodan</b>
<b>Arjuna Sujit-Kumar</b>	<b>Swedesboro</b>	<b>Shodan</b>
<b>Petra Wehbe</b>	<b>Swedesboro</b>	<b>Shodan</b>
<b>Joseph Wehbe</b>	<b>Swedesboro</b>	<b>Sandan</b>
<b>Wilson Zhang</b>	<b>Swedesboro</b>	<b>Shodan</b>
<b>Jonathan Zippel</b>	<b>Mullica Hill</b>	<b>Nidan</b>

***“A black belt is a white belt who never  
gave up.”***





**Jason Ager  
Pitman**

I think much of my love of karate comes from my love of martial arts movies. My first-degree bio mentioned *The Karate Kid* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. However, I was remiss in leaving out one flick in particular. Just this past week, I rewatched the phenomenal 80s film *The Last Dragon*, a personal favorite in this genre. For the uninitiated, the story follows Leroy Green as he learns through battling his own insecurity and the villainous Sho Nuff, The Shogun of Harlem, that the true master he seeks must be found within. His faith lies in the belief that a true master could make his body glow with energy through the practice and perfection of his martial arts. Just like Leroy Green, my personal hero and the eponymous last dragon, I find myself on the search for a greater “glow” through my martial arts journey. Most humbly, I must admit that that glow usually takes the form of a halo of sweat that I leave each class on Sensei Sickles mats in the dojo. Though I may never be the Shogun of Harlem or The Last Dragon, I am nevertheless proud of the road I continue to walk. I look forward to joining the ranks of the CIT students this coming year, learning more advanced curriculum (though my feeble Tornado Kick may never produce any real gusts of wind), and seeing my daughter become the fourth black belt in our house. I would once again like to thank Sensei Sickles for his patience and encouragement, my wife Danielle for her undying support and my son Liam for his ability to keep me young and on my toes.





**Liam Ager  
Pitman**

I started Karate at 9 years old. Candidate training remains the hardest thing I have ever done in my life, but I am hoping to once again rise to the occasion. I hope to study karate until my 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> degree black belt. One of my favorite moments this past year of training was receiving and learning to use the katana and sai. The people who have helped me the most getting to here are Sensei Ryan Sickles, Sensei Walker, my mother, Danielle Ager, my father Jason Ager, Robbie Collins and the Schoens. I look forward to making more memories at the dojo and in karate!



**Delcan Antoshka**  
**West Deptford**

My name is Declan Antoshka. I am 12 years old. I'm a 7<sup>th</sup> grader at Gateway Regional High School. I live in National Park. I started karate at OKKA West Deptford in February 2022. I wanted to do karate to be able to defend myself. Karate has helped me be a better person. I am WAY more disciplined, focused and respectful. Not only in the dojo but at home and school too.



My short term goals are to earn my 1<sup>st</sup> degree and 2<sup>nd</sup> degree blackbelt. I look forward to getting my last name on my belt. A long term goal of my is to get my drivers license so I can spend more time training at the dojo. I plan to continue to do karate to participate in a worldwide tournament to represent my OKKA family.

Karate has changed my life. I am more confident and stronger than ever. This training is very hard but it's making me realize how important this is to me. I want to thank my parents for driving me back and forth to the dojo multiple times a week all year round. I wouldn't have been able to do it without them supporting me. I also want to thank Hanshi. He has been a great instructor and role model of the adult I'd like to someday be. Sempai, Gabe and Mr. Camuso have taught and encouraged me to keep going and to never give up. I will be forever grateful for everything I've learned since starting karate.



**Silas Burke**  
**West Deptford**

I started karate at 4 years old when my buddy Cliff invited me into karate on buddy week. The most memorable moment in the dojo is when I received my white belt. My instructor, Hanshi, told me I was going to be a fine black belt someday. I thought I was going to get it in the next class. At four years old, I never thought it would take me 6 more years for me to get my first degree black belt and now my second degree.



I would love to become a 5th degree black belt or higher. In the past I have thought of being mayor, governor, and president. That is still my life goal and I am on the right track because I got elected SCHOOL president! I would also love to become an actor, I have done 1 show, Moana I was the main character, Maui. I am in the middle of a play called Footloose. I am the main character in that too, Ren.

I have had a lot of help from Hanshi, Sempai, Gabe, Lance, Declan, any other students in the dojo, and you can't forget Mrs. Hanshi. Thank you a lot to my parents and grandparents for driving me to karate every class. They didn't just drive me but they also cheered me on through the classes and tests. Thank you to my friends and teachers for supporting me through the tough times.

Thank you,  
Silas Burke



# Congratulations Silas!



Silas, we couldn't be more proud of you. For an eleven year old to become a second degree black belt, class president, entrepreneur of your own business, caring brother to your siblings, and all around great kid is such a huge accomplishment! Keep up the good work! You're destined for greatness!

Love,  
Dad, Mom, Lily, and Shay



**Gabriella Cacia**  
**Swedesboro**

My name is Gabriella Cacia, and I began karate in the spring of 2022 when I was seven and a half years old. I wanted to learn karate to become disciplined and more confident. My favorite moments in the dojo involve sparring, and my most memorable event was a breaking board challenge where I broke five boards using my back fist. My short-term goal is to earn a first-degree black belt. My long-term goal is to become an OKKA instructor. My goal in life is to open my own dojo teaching martial arts. .



I would like to acknowledge all those who have encouraged, supported, and helped me achieve my goal towards black belt excellence: Sensei Grogan, Mr. Zak, Mr. Nolan, the CIT members, and fellow students; my parents and sister; teachers, and friends.





**Tristan Clark**  
**Pitman**

I have been a student at Okinawa Karate Kenpo Kobudo for over 4 years. In 2020, I was learning how to play the trumpet. Because of Covid, my trumpet lessons moved to an online school. As a result, the evaluations required perfection and this made me extremely frustrated. My parents thought that karate would be interesting. I started learning karate in the middle of October that year.



It is hard to identify a specific moment, but I enjoy learning new things. My favorite class items are sparring, and weapons training, specifically the bo.

My favorite katas are Taikyoku Rokudan and Naihachi Shodan. I really like the movements. Naichachi Shodan is memorable as this was my first kata I learned. I was recently asked to be a CIT. Currently, I work with the younger students during their warm-ups. This has helped me build my leadership skills. I enjoy many of activities off of the mat, such as Nerf Wars, Water Wars, volleyball and dodgeball. It is fun to play with friends who are my age.

For my short-term karate goals, I want to learn how to be a better instructor. I have made some mistakes, but work on correcting them. In school, I am a sophomore and am active in cross-country and track & field. In two years, I will be graduating high school. I plan on attending Temple University, but am unsure of what I will study. Right now, I am thinking about a career in either engineering or business.

Sensei Sickles continues to be a big influence in my training. Sensei has taken the time to work with me and provide additional opportunities. Gavin Forchic, Ella Everwine, Christian Miller and Mike Noble has helped me in the dojo. I am fortunate to have them as my friends. Finally, my parents have guided and helped me throughout these years. They have made sure that I am on time to the dojo, complete my requirements and continue to be my greatest support.

**Tristan, Congratulations on all you have accomplished - 2<sup>nd</sup> degree black belt, CIT, Cross-Country and school. We are all proud of you!!! Love, Mom, Dad, Griffin, Elena, William, Jocelyn and Marin...**



**Rori Danhiers**  
**Swedesboro**

I started karate 3 ½ years ago to help me control my emotions and anger. I learned to work hard and channel my feelings into doing better and teaching my friends/ teachers karate outside of the dojo. The memory of my first board breaking challenge, that I was champion, is something I will always remember. I also enjoyed competing in the tournaments and making friends with classmates. After my black belt, I plan to help teach the younger kids. This is be after a much deserved break! I plan to go for my 2nd degree to get my name on my belt. I want to be a teacher, so helping the kids learn with help me in my profession when I grow up. There are a LOT of people who have been there for me on my quest for a black belt. First, my mom and twin, Reagan, for being there for me. My mom drove me all around and pushed me, even when I hated it, to have me ready for candidacy. I love you mom and Reagan! Reagan, my twin, for letting me practice on you and making me laugh when you tried to do the karate moves. (She is a gymnast, she can't kick hard) My Poppy and GaeGae for always being there for me at my belt ceremonies, tournaments, and practice. My Poppy is always there with advice or to tell me to work harder. JoJo, Aunt Dani, Aunt Jac, TT, Uncle Webby, Uncle Derek, Dec, Jayden, Auggie, and Pap for driving in numerous times from Pittsburgh to watch, support me, and love/cheering me on from afar. Mimi, for being at my belt graduations and believing in me. Roxy, Josie, Harper, and my other friends for joining me during bring a friend week and cheering me on. Finally, MR. ZAK, YOU ROCK! I cannot thank you enough for all the time and help you have given me. I would not be here today without your help. Ms. Natalie, Mr. Braydon, Mr. Jayson thank you for running through my skills with me. Last, THANK YOU SENSEI GROGAN!!! You have made karate fun, challenging, and a sport that I love. You are the best teacher and a great person!



***Rori, you amaze me every day! Watching you go for your belt has showed me your grit, dedication, and discipline. Continue to push through the challenges you face, you are truly an awesome kid!***

***Love, Mom***

***Rori, we are so proud of you! You got this! Nathan and Connor are looking up to you, you are amazing! We love you!***

***Love, Aunt Tori, Uncle Ryan, Nathan, and Connor***

***RoriAnn, you did it kid! You amaze me and I could never do those moves. Congratulations black belt!***

***Love, MiMi***

***Congrats on making it this far. Now if a kidnapper comes by you will be the one to kick them and then beat them up (he will probably end up dead). Love, Roxanne***

***Congrats sissy on your black belt! Make sure you don't break the door or walls practicing your kicks. Love, Reagan***

***Congratulations on achieving your black belt. This is something you worked for and earned. We are so proud of you! Love, Poppy and Gae***

***Aubrey, Lainey, Uncle Eddie and Aunt Tiff are so proud of you, black belt! Rori, you are such a great kid and the girls adore you. We love you!***

***Congratulations, Rori on earning your black belt! Your hard work, determination, and dedication have truly paid off. This achievement is a testament to your perseverance and discipline. We love you and are so proud of you!***

***Love, Uncle Web, Aunt Danni, Tristan and August***

***CONGRATULATIONS RORI DANHIRES!!!***

***We are so proud of your years of dedication, training, discipline and reaching this highest level of excellence.***

***With all our love and admiration,***

***Grandma JoJo and PapPap***

***CONGRATULATIONS RORI DANHIRES!!!***

***We are so proud of you! There is no limit to the greatness that you can achieve when you put your mind to it. Let your heart guide you and know that we love and support you always and forever!***

***We love you to the moon & back!!***

***- Declan, Jayden, Aunt Jacque, & Uncle Derek! <3***

***Sending you a huge congratulations on your fantastic achievement, your black belt! Your determination, dedication, drive, and confidence makes you the best! Keep shining, inspiring others, and reaching for the stars. You continue to prove that! we are so proud of you baby! Love aunt Devon, Kenzie, and Asher***



**Jesus Diaz**  
**Swedesboro**

Hello, I am Jesus Diaz, and I started karate around 2022. I wanted to do karate because of the movies, and I was always interested in martial arts started but when I started to get bullied in middle school, I got an excuse to do karate, so my parents signed me up.

My favorite moment in karate I experienced was the first time I did sparring because I had never fought with karate experience. And my most memorable moment is when I won my first board breaking tournament.

In karate my short-term goal is to become a helper and teach a class and my long-term goal is to become a fighter, I don't know in what type though.

I would like to thank Sensei and Mr. Zak because they were the ones who helped me through the journey of the candidate training.





**Erin Doyle**  
**Mullica Hill**

My name is Erin Doyle, and I am 20 years old. I am a sophomore at Rowan University where I am majoring in Business Management with a minor in both Marketing and Entrepreneurship. I live at home with Mom, Dad, and my older sister, Colleen. Some hobbies that I have besides karate are hanging out with my friends and family whenever I can, cooking, reading, and watching movies and shows at home.



I started karate when I was 11 years old on February 29, 2016. My dad had already been talking to me about doing some form of martial arts, but it was not definite that I was going to do it. Then, one of my friends invited me to the dojo for a movie night with her. While I was at movie night, I immediately had a good feeling about the atmosphere and environment. The same friend later took me to two buddy nights in the same week, and I signed up for karate very shortly afterwards. For almost nine years, which is practically half of my life, karate has played a crucial role in my life. It has and continues to shape me into the person that I am today. If I had not joined karate all of those years ago, I would not have the skills, confidence, determination, or the physical, mental, or emotional strength that I have today. Karate has improved my life in every single aspect, and I am forever grateful that I decided to go to movie night that one night with my friend.

My favorite and proudest memory of karate was when I received my first degree black belt. I cannot even begin to describe the feeling that I had when we all took a knee after the final hour of the exam. When Hanshi Dargan handed me my first degree black belt at the black belt extravaganza six years ago, I realized that I had finally accomplished what I had viewed as being almost impossible. Pride swelled through my whole body. However, receiving my fourth degree black belt will come as a very close second proudest memory because of the amount of physical effort that is required and the immense amount of curriculum that needs to be learned.



Some of my short term goals are to graduate from Rowan University with honors and excellent grades. I am still figuring out where exactly I would like to work, but working in the food industry, at a company such as Campbell's, is something I am taking into consideration.

My long term goal is to have a well-established career. Hopefully I would be able to settle down and have a family and be a stay-at-home mom.

I would like to thank Mom, Dad, and Colleen for always supporting me with all the things I did during karate, along with driving me to and from classes for about six of the nine years. I also want to thank all of my friends in karate who have helped me get through the long process of training. I especially want to thank my fellow fourth degree candidates Mr. Kane and Brendan Kane. I would not have been able to succeed as a black belt if they were not there alongside me, supporting and sharing their knowledge. And lastly, I want to thank Sensei TJ, Sensei Fran, Sensei Kweeder, and in particular, Sensei Aidan for having the time and patience required to teach me karate throughout these many years. They have all helped to shape me into the person that I am today, and they have given me so many opportunities that have allowed me to be successful in life. Without them, I would not be the confident and driven person that I am today. Again, thank you to all of those who were, and will continue to be, supporting me during these many years of karate.

***Erin,***

***Before starting karate, you were a quiet, shy young girl. After almost 9 years of hard work and accomplishing more than you could've dreamed, you've become a confident young adult with a good sense of who you are and what you can do. Congratulations!***  
***Love, Mom***



***Congratulations on your 4<sup>th</sup> Degree Black Belt in Karate. I know you've worked hard and you have the confidence to do anything. You'll always have these accomplishments to support your future efforts. I love you and am very proud of you! A Great Big HUG!  
Love, Dad***

***Congratulations on achieving your 4<sup>th</sup> Degree Black Belt! This is an amazing accomplishment, and I always knew you could do it. I am incredibly proud of you!  
Love, Colleen***

**Claire Evans  
Swedesboro**

My name is Claire Evans. I started karate when I was six. I have been doing karate for three years. I started karate because I went on a field trip to the Swedesboro dojo. It was really fun, so I asked my parents if I could sign up. Some of my favorite times at karate have been learning new self-defense, being a helper, and having fun at Stations Week. I love going to the events, too. I have wanted to become a black belt since I went on the field trip and saw the



instructors wearing theirs. My mom and dad have encouraged me through this training. My instructors (Sensei, Mr. Zak, Mr. Nolan, Mr. Jayson, and the Senseis from Mullica Hill) have all helped and guided me through the training, and I would like to thank them for their support and encouragement. The candidates from the Swedesboro dojo have helped me get through the 8 week training to the end. In the short term, I would like to get my second degree black belt and learn new self-defense. Eventually, I would like to get my fifth degree black belt, and become an engineer by getting top marks from a good college like MIT.

Thank You,  
Claire

***Congratulations, Claire! We are so proud of you  
and all of the hard work you put in to get your  
black belt. We love you!***

***Love,  
Dad, Mom, and Charlotte***



**Ella Everwine  
Pitman**

My name is Ella Everwine and I am seventeen years old. I started karate because I wanted to learn something new since I was not doing any sports then. An even bigger motivation was because I wanted to learn how to defend myself.



One of my favorite memories since I started karate was when I was a brown belt able to participate in the sparring circles for whoever the candidates were, so much so that I would try to go every day that week. I even enjoyed having to go through them. Whenever it came to me having to do it, I always knew that, with myself at least, having a "plan" was not going to help and would fall apart in five minutes. Focusing on each person was better than thinking of the whole thing, from start to end, as that made it seem like an insurmountable task that I, a profound procrastinator, would not want to do. In my head, I knew that I would only fail if I completely gave up and did not finish the test, which I would never allow myself to do, so I was content with simply trying to survive for twenty minutes or so. I also think that the main reason I like it so much is because I have so much respect for anyone willing to make it that far and then do something that, when I first saw it as a brown belt, seems so impossible. I quickly realized it was not that impossible and after doing it twice (soon to be three times as of writing this), I walked away thinking about how it was all a blur, yet still remembering those several punches I did not block but probably could have.

Going to karate has been a large part of my life for the past years, even more so since I became a brown belt. Then, once I got my first degree, I found that karate suited me. It was structured and, since this was before I started cross country and track, I liked knowing I was exercising regularly throughout the week. I got so used to my schedule and when I found I had extra time after school, I immediately decided that I wanted to spend more time at karate. Most of the time I would come half an hour, sometimes even an hour early so that I could practice my curriculum. On a few odd occasions, I would arrive at the dojo before

Sensei Sickles got there, which has happened a couple of times this year already. I generally overthink most things, especially when it comes to karate, so I found comfort in the fact that even if I did know what I had to do for the cycle, I could always go early just to be sure. Asking Sensei questions always helped as well, whether it was with kata or weapons or if I had already asked the question (which in most cases was true). Even if he knew he had answered it before and I was triple-checking () or if it was a simple question that slipped my mind, he would still answer it and would not fault me if it came out to be a pretty easy answer.

I still remember when I got my first degree black belt because that was the last time I was ever in an extravaganza or a regular exam day for candidate training. When I went for my second degree, the exams had just been the six of us and Sensei since it was shortly after the quarantine. It's crazy to me how even with my bad memory, I still remember when I got my first degree five years ago. I distinctly remember that when Sensei was flipping over cards during class, I had to perform combination #7 by myself and I stood there because I forgot it. I'm not forgetting that; it actually will forever haunt me to this day and I will never not feel a jolt of fear when I hear it called out. But in all seriousness, it is something you do not forget because nothing compares to that feeling of knowing that you earned your black belt. I remember saying, during those eight weeks, how I would stop after I got my first degree, and looking back, I would never expect those words to come out of my mouth. If asked I would have told you that someone else said that because it seems like such a foreign concept to me. Stopping karate. Not a break, just done. Stopping when there was still more to learn. Even when it has been hard to have a regular schedule, I've never stopped with the intention of never going back to a place that had become like a second home to me. I laugh now when I think about all those times I did not go because school had been too exhausting or my run had been exhausting, even though I have proved to myself several times over that going to karate cures everything. I'll be annoyed before karate class, but remember that I have to practice and all of a sudden the only thing that matters is what I'm practicing. And by the end of class, I forgot what I was even mad about.

When I started high school, there was a definite shift in my training schedule. And by that I mean I went sporadically for four months or so

and then did not go once for two months with the unexpected workload of honors classes and high school sports. I had started doing cross country, so I was at least running every weekday after school. Then when I finally went back to karate, albeit hesitant because it was candidate training season and I feared I remembered nothing, I tried getting back into a schedule that worked. However, it depended on what homework I had so sometimes I would pop in unexpectedly on a Monday or take a week off and then go for three days in a row. It was during this time that I took advantage of Friday open mat classes, where I could practice my curriculum with little to no people around. I liked the low ratio of people because I felt almost guilty for not being there and just frustrated that I had to stop and start constantly to fix the gaps in what I had retained during my hiatus. Eventually, it got better; as I improved at karate, I improved during the winter and spring track seasons. I ran the 800 and 1600, tried out for javelin, ran a surprise 4x200, and fell over some hurdles.

Then sophomore year came around and I retreated into textbooks and essays. Another two, karate-less months passed, but this time when I returned, I was reluctant for an entirely different reason: that winter would have been when I went into candidate training for my third degree. I was short several belt tips and had a vague idea of the curriculum, so I was not one. But knowing that I could have felt awful. And it was not like anyone put any pressure on me at all to do it or ceaselessly reminded me of my shortcomings. But it kind of hurt watching two of my friends, who I had gotten my first and second degrees with, get their third degrees and another two get their fourth degrees. Despite how stuck I felt, I was still happy for them because I knew they had earned and deserved it after those eight weeks. It was that year, just last year, where I made a promise to myself that I would not take a long break again, I would stick to a schedule, I would help out with events, I would do CIT training again (which I stopped when I started high school), and by that time next year, I would be the one in the extravaganza instead of watching it. And I kept to that (hopefully, said past me while writing this during week four, quite sure that she would get three x's in a week).

My future goals for karate are to help out more with the other classes, which I have been trying to do more often these past eight weeks. I am definitely not the best at it. I still have trouble remembering people's



names and I get so nervous that I convince myself that I am doing combination #1 wrong, but as soon as I see the kids smiling and having fun, I'm reminded that they are not judging me as harshly as I somehow think they are. I like being able to help them and it's great to see others who love doing karate as much as I do.

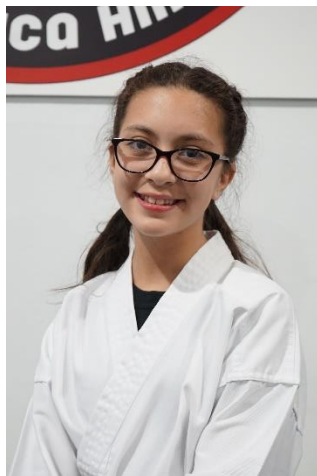
I would like to thank my parents, first and foremost, for driving me everywhere because I was way too scared to do so myself. I am incredibly grateful for everything you have done for me to contribute to this. I would also like to thank Sensei Sickles and my fellow candidates for supporting me these past eight weeks; it is always great to know that I'm not alone in doing this.





**Amanda Garcia  
Pitman**

I started Karate because I thought it looked super cool and my mom wanted us to do something so she put us in karate. My favorite moments were when I got a new belt it made me feel like I accomplished something. My Karate goal is to become a black belt. The people who helped me get this far are my mom, dad, Sensei Sickles, and my friends.



**Andres Garcia  
Pitman**

I started karate because my parents wanted me to learn how to protect myself if I get into a fight. I started karate when I was 7 years old. My favorite moments of karate are when we play dodgeball with my sensei. Sensei Sickles helped me become a candidate and not to be scared of going through candidate season. My mom, Carmen, and my Dad, Carlos helped me practice karate. My life goal is to get a black belt and pass candidate season.



**Kara Gleason  
Pitman**

My karate journey started not too long after my 12th birthday in July of 2022. I wanted to join karate because I felt as a teenage girl, it would be extremely beneficial to be able to defend myself, and those around me if I were ever to be put in that kind of situation.

I have a couple of favorite moments from the events that I have participated in. For one, every competition/tournament that I have competed in, I've always had a very good experience. Seeing other students from other dojos also helped me learn to improve some of my own flaws as well. I also loved the 2024 Fourth of July parade, it was very fun to hang out with everyone and it made me feel proud and confident to not only help promote the dojo, but to also put on an amazing show for the viewers as well.



I have many people who have helped me achieve all that I have so far and I am so glad I have them. Starting off with the dojo, everyone there has helped me grow, especially Sensei Sickles and Sensei Walker, as well as all of the higher up black belts who lead and teach the class. Of course, my family have been huge supporters throughout my whole journey, my mom, my dad, my aunt, my grandfather, and my sister have been there for me since day one. My friends watch videos of me from tournaments and cheer me on as well. Or some days when I am hurt or not feeling too good because of karate, they will help me and push me to keep going.

I am very lucky to be in karate. I think it is one of the best decisions that I have ever made and I do not see myself stopping anytime soon. I am very lucky and grateful to have the best instructors, classmates, family and friends who help me and cheer me on as much as they can. I cannot wait to make more memories further down the road.



**Congratulations Kara!**  
**All of your hard work and dedication has paid off!**  
**We are so proud of you and all of your**  
**accomplishments along the way ! Love always, Mom,**  
**Dad, Neek, Nat, Gemma and Starr**



## **Nathan Jeremiah Hall**

### **Mullica Hill**

I began taking karate classes with OKKA when I was approximately six years old. The reason I started karate was because my mom made me, I didn't really want to do karate, I thought I would just never fight anyone, so I would never need karate. I was wrong. Karate is so much more than training to fight.



Some of my favorite moments at the dojo were when I was a dragon and Sensei Aidan told the class to line up in three lines. He told us to line up with our favorite instructor, only to have one long line in front of Sensei Aidan! Another of my favorite memories was when Senpai Randy moved a bag on the downstairs mat, saw a marble roll out and thought it was a mouse! He squealed in a high-pitched voice while I was practicing my karate. That's why I call him Senpai marbles!

My goals for my life could be classified as short term, long term, and lifelong goals. My short-term goals are to get my black belt, then graduate from GCCS in 2027 with all 'A's. My long-term goals are to continue practicing karate and go to college. My lifelong goals are to be able do 100 consecutive push-ups, get married, have kids, and open my own dojo.

During my karate training, I've had a lot of people help me. Sensei Aidan has been my favorite instructor, and not just because I have to pick him or be punished, he really is my favorite. My mom and dad are the reasons I can even get to the dojo, and my mom is the reason I started karate. Sensei Fran has been a huge help to me, whether it be practically carrying me on her back when I'm behind on what's going on or bringing me items I forgot. Sensei TJ has been a great help. He helped me realize I'm not always right, and that there is a time for play, and a time for work. All of the Senpais at OKKA Mullica Hill have been helpful, too. Senpai Brandon, Randy, Chris, and Trista have helped me with my curriculum countless times, and also showed me the bunkai behind my katas. I would not be here today without them.



***Congratulations to Nathan Jeremiah Hall!***

***Today, we celebrate your achievement of earning your first-degree black belt. Less than five percent of karate students who begin the journey reach this point. Earning this rank is a major accomplishment. Your black-belt journey began back in 2014, when you were only in kindergarten. You have put forth years of hard work, dedication to training, and discipline. Now that you have earned your first-degree black***



***belt,, you will realize that earning this rank is just the beginning of your martial arts journey.***

***Being a black belt means more than demonstrating skills and technique. It means upholding the values of focus, discipline, and respect in both the Dojo and in everyday life. We are so incredibly proud of all you have accomplished, and excited to watch you continue to grow. Love now and always, Mama, Kayla, Silas, Faith, and Max.***







**Silas Daniel Hall**  
**Mullica Hill**

I am Silas Hall, and I have been part of the OKKA Mullica Hill family for as long as I can remember. I started in March of 2014. I was only three years old. I started karate because my mother told me to. She was worried about me because I am so small and wanted me to be safer. I remember how much fun the Little Dragons class was with Sensei Fran. Sometimes we would play “Jump the snake” after class. I LOVED jumping that rope!



One of my favorite memories is how proud I was when I earned my second-degree dragon black belt! Sensei Fran told me that was a very rare accomplishment! Another fun memory was playing sword and shield night. So many fun things at the old dojo, even though my brother Nathan always beat me!

I have many goals in life. Short term goals include earning this first-degree black belt, then helping my mama and sister study to earn theirs soon! My future goals are to go to college to study business and art.

I want to thank Sensei Fran for keeping me interested in karate. She always makes learning fun, and I can see how much she loves her students. Especially me! I also want to thank Sensei Aidan for his patience and interesting sense of humor in all our lessons. I also want to thank Sensei TJ for helping me understand that karate is a serious discipline and not just a sport. All the Sempis at our dojo have helped me achieve this goal, but special thanks to the Kanes and Mr. Donovan. You are always so patient with me when I need help or felt confused. And of course, thank you to the best big brother a kid could have. Nathan, thank you for helping me focus in class and in life, and thank you for always being willing to train and help me practice at home.



***Congratulations to Silas Daniel Hall!***

***Today, we celebrate your achievement of earning your first-degree black belt. A black belt is a white belt who never quit! Earning this rank is a major accomplishment. Your black-belt journey began back in 2014, when you were only in preschool. You have worked so hard to earn this achievement! From board breaking at your very first class to earning a second-degree***

***dragon black belt to preparing for this next part of your black belt journey, it has been such a joy to watch you learn and grow. Now that you have earned your first-degree black belt, you will realize that earning this rank is just the beginning of your martial arts journey.***

***Being a black belt means more than demonstrating skills and technique. It means upholding the values of focus, discipline, and respect in both the Dojo and in everyday life.***

***We are so incredibly proud of all you have accomplished, and excited to watch you continue to grow. Love now and always, Mama, Kayla, Nathan, Faith, and Max.***



## **Lance Jalandoni**

### **West Deptford**

My name is Lance Jalandoni, I was born on October 24, 2014. I started my journey here at the West Deptford OKKA Dojo sometime in 2019 as a Little Dragon, when I was 5 years old. My parents brought me here just to give it a try and see if I had interest in Karate. I have been doing karate now for 5 years and hoping to finally earn my First-Degree Black Belt.



My life and experiences here at the dojo were not easy at all. It entails hard work, perseverance, and commitment to achieve my goals. Regardless of it, I love coming here and try not to miss a class. Hanshi always makes sure that we get intensive training every time. I learned proper self-defense, self-discipline, the importance of effort and respect for courtesy. I became more confident and developed a never-give-up attitude.

There are also other exciting activities that we do at the dojo. We participate in community service like attending the Fall Festival Parade or 4th of July Parade. We take this opportunity to promote our school to the community and inspire them to join our dojo and pass out candies to kids. Another is the Karate tournament. It is a friendly competition among students, from different dojos, demonstrating Kata or weapons or the board breaking challenge. My favorite is the movie night. We all get excited when Hanshi announces a date for a movie night. We get to watch a movie and eat pizza and popcorn and not have to think about training and just have fun. The best part is always the Belt Graduation where we progress through our training. Our new rank represents another level of proficiency in our skills, kata, techniques, and knowledge.

I was able to reach this milestone because of the amazing people around me. I am especially grateful for my mentor, Hanshi, Mr. Ron Dargan, and Senpai Dalton Damon for all their patience and sharing their expertise and their strong leadership skills. I am also thankful for

my fellow students, who also are my inspiration and has the same dedication and discipline and passion for continuous improvement in our skills. And most especially, my mum and dad for their unconditional love and support and all the sacrifices that they do for me to get to where I am today, and to Papa Jesus for the gift of life.



**Brendan Kane**  
**Mullica Hill**

Martial Arts isn't just a sport or activity, it's a way of living. I feel as though we all relate to this saying somehow, but for me personally, this statement describes exactly what I have experienced over the past 12 years of my life. Ever since I started my martial arts journey, I have loved and enjoyed it endlessly. When I was just 8 years old, starting out on my birthday as a gift to myself from my family, I couldn't get enough of it. Now here I am, all this time later finally reaching my 4th degree black belt.



Telling people outside of the dojo what rank I am always kind of gets the same few responses: "Oh so you must be really good then" or "So you could probably beat me up." Lately, the more and more I respond to these reactions, I find myself thinking about what it really means to be my rank. Am I really that good? Maybe compared to when I was 8 years old, then yes I am good. But compared to my own instructors, such as Sensei Aidan and Sensei Sickles, I feel like I'm the worst in the world and know nothing. But nowadays, I realized that thinking this way isn't quite correct. Now, as an instructor myself, I've stepped into the spotlight where students are comparing themselves to me, just the same as I had done in the past. It's not about how good you are compared to somebody else, it's about how good you are compared to yourself. Even further, it's about how good you are at sharing your enjoyment for the things you love with others. The journey of a Martial Artist is ultimately a very independent one, until it becomes time to share what you have learned with others as a black belt should.

For me, my goals in life are to keep moving forward with Karate and Martial Arts as a whole. I want to one day become a 5th degree black belt, and even possibly run my own school and be just as much of an influence as all my other instructors before me. Just this year, I had started a new style, Capoeira, where I'm being taught under Sensei Sickles. I hope to continue that in the future and work towards my rank in another style. In my own life, I'm working towards my computer



science degree at Rowan University, with which I hope to continue working in IT just like my father, too.





## Randy Kane Mullica Hill

My journey at the Mullica Hill Dojo began eight years ago and now at 56 years old, going for 4<sup>th</sup> degree blackbelt. At that point in my life, the idea of pursuing a 4th-degree black belt in Karate seemed almost unimaginable. Yet, here I am today, reflecting on a path that, though challenging at times, has been incredibly rewarding—thanks in large part to the support of my fellow students and the guidance of our instructors.



Over the years, I've learned that the path to mastery is never linear. As I progressed through my training, I continually had to reassess and update my goals. Each step forward was not just about physical technique but also about mental resilience, discipline, and personal growth. The journey toward achieving my 4th-degree black belt has been no different. It's been a constant process of evolving, pushing boundaries, and deepening my understanding of martial arts.

In recent years, I've had the privilege of teaching classes and working with students of all levels, which has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my journey. Sharing what I've learned and witnessing the progress of others has deepened my own understanding of Karate and reinforced my commitment to this art. I've also gained valuable experience in leadership and mentorship, which has been both humbling and inspiring.

Despite the milestones I've reached, I know there is still so much more to learn. My passion for Karate and my dedication to the dojo continue to drive me forward. As I look ahead, I'm excited to continue my role as an instructor, helping others grow and develop their skills. I'm also eager for the new challenges and adventures that lie ahead in this lifelong journey.

*Congratulations  
4th Degree Black Belts*

2012



*in the beginning*

*1st degree black belts*



2018

2024



*4th degree Mudden*

RANDY & BRENDAN  
KANE

*To my amazing husband and son, congratulations on achieving your 4th-degree black belts! After 8 years of dedication, sweat, and relentless hard work, you've reached this incredible milestone. I'm so proud of all you've accomplished. Watching you both grow stronger, more disciplined, and more passionate about martial arts throughout this journey has been a privilege. Here's to every challenge you've faced and all the ones you'll continue to conquer.*

**Robert Kizirian**  
**Swedesboro**

My Name is Robert Kizirian Jr, I started Karate on January 3<sup>rd</sup> 2022. I joined Karate to help myself refocus my life goals and as an outlet for the frustrations of everyday life.

Some of my favorite moments at the dojo are how well everyone is willing to teach and help each other, the humor in the teens/ adults class, and of course the flying kicks.

I would like to thank Sensei and all the Instructors at the Swedesboro Dojo that help me along the way, never giving up on me, even though I did have my doubts at times. I would also like to especially thank my wife who also helped push me through some tough times as well by convincing me to spend more time at the dojo so I can earn my black belt.

Thank you all for so much.







**Nathan Labuda**  
**Swedesboro**

Hello, my name is Nathan Labuda and I am 9 years old. I started karate in 2021 when I was 6 years old. I started because it looked fun and was something new to do in addition to soccer. In the beginning I was a little shy and nervous, but after a couple sessions I realized it was a lot of fun and even had some friends in class.



My favorite moments in the dojo were when I started doing leadership and learning weapons. My most memorable event I participated in was my first board breaking tournament, I really liked breaking boards and getting a medal.

When I first joined karate it was for fun. One night at dinner I learned my cousin Nicole is a second degree black belt. She was excited when I told her I was in karate. She told me about her experiences in karate; especially how much martial-arts helped her build confidence, determination, and strength. That was the moment I realized I wanted to become a second degree or higher. I think karate is helping me be more confident, disciplined, and determined.

I don't know what I want to be when I grow up, all I know is that I want to be happy. I would like to thank everyone who helped me during karate. All of my instructors; specifically Sensei Grogan, Master Odo, Mr. Jayson, and Mr. Zak. I would also like to thank my Dad, Mom, and my little sister Quinn. And thank you to my 4th grade teacher for encouraging me.

**Nathan,**

***Congratulations on becoming a Black Belt. We want you to know how proud of you we are. We were with you through your journey, from little dragons to now becoming a black belt. We saw your growth, focus, hard work, drive, hours of training, years of sweat, dedication and discipline. We supported you, but YOU became a black belt. This is something you earned and we could not be more impressed and honored.***

***Take a moment to reflect on your journey, every time you look at the black belt around your waist it's a reminder of this wonderful achievement. You persevered through the tough training and found inner strength to continue forward to accomplish becoming a black belt.***

***A black belt is a white belt that never gave up. Nathan you never gave up and earned this.***

***Enjoy it! We love you! Mom, Dad, and Quinn***







## Mason Leo Swedesboro

My name is Mason Leo I am 9 years old. I started karate when I was 5 years old because I thought it would be fun. In the past 4 years, I have learned so much. My favorite part was finally joining leadership and being able to learn weapon skills. I have enjoyed breaking boards and learning new techniques. I plan to get my black belt and continue to further my training in karate over the next few years. Sensei Amanda has been a big help in the dojo. Zack has also been an instructor I have looked up to. Arjuna has been my friend through it all. I appreciate all my family supporting me, but especially my mom and nana for making sure I get to classes each week.



**Mia Luczkiewicz  
Pitman**

I started karate when I was 4 years old in April of 2019. I started because I liked the idea of doing a sport where I didn't have to wear shoes. My Mom tells me that she wanted me to do a new sport because I did not seem to like other things I tried. I did the Little Dragons class for 3 years, earning my double blackbelt before I moved up into the older classes. Karate has helped me with getting my memory better with remembering things. Karate has also made me stronger physically and mentally. My favorite thing about karate is board breaking tournaments. Mini tournaments are probably my favorite when doing board breaking. My favorite memory is taking first place in a mini tournament for board breaking last year. My goal is to keep going with my karate and become a higher degree black belt. There were a lot of people who have helped me in the almost six years I've been doing karate - Izzy, Joe, John, Catherine, Ella, Dominic, Zoe, Sensei Sickles, Sensei Walker and Senpai Jake. Thank you for helping me.



***Congratulations to our girls, Zoe & Mia, on earning your black belt!! We are so proud of all your hard work and dedication to karate and candidate training! This the most deserving achievement! We can't wait to see what the future holds for you both in karate and in life! The world is yours!! Love you both so much, Mommy & Daddy ❤️***





**Zoe Luczkiewicz  
Pitman**

I started karate after I went to a buddy week class with my sister. I began classes in June 2022. I really enjoy karate. Karate has made me stronger and has helped me with lots of other things like conditioning for soccer. I have been able to have more time on the field in soccer because I was able to build up my stamina and become a better runner for soccer and karate. Karate has helped me remember lots of things. Before, I wasn't able to memorize a bunch of my piano music now and am able to remember more of my sheet music for piano. For me one of my most memorable events in the dojo was when I was invited to join leadership. I saw my sister doing leadership and thought "Wow I hope I can do that." I was also excited when I got into the brown/black belt class. Another memorable time was when I got my red folder for candidate training. I was so happy and excited and proud of myself for being asked to be a candidate for a black belt. One of my goals for karate is to try to get a third-degree black belt or higher. Another goal I have in life is to make it on to the girls' varsity soccer team in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. I also want to be able to try out for the Barons soccer club team this year. I have had so much help from many people during karate - like Catherine, John, Joe, Izzy, Mia, Kara, Ella, Dominic, and many more people during candidate training. I feel like if I didn't have this help, I wouldn't have gotten this far in this cycle. Kara and Catherine have especially been a huge help to me during training. They have both helped me and supported me.





## **Alanna Lukasiewicz Swedesboro**

I started Karate in 2021 at the age of 9 for a wide range of benefits. I wanted to learn self-defense, be physically fit, grow my self-confidence, and a little bit because I really like the movie “The Karate Kid” and REALLY like the show “Cobra Kai”. I admired how the students learned mental and physical discipline, respect for others, and how they could defend themselves and others in need. This inspired me to learn more about karate and how I could benefit from learning and advancing through trainings.



My favorite memories in the Swedesboro dojo is the fun I had during station weeks, learning weapons, and making new friends. The Nun Chucks were my favorite until I started training with the Sai – you know, the weapon Raphael from Teenage Mutant Turtles uses.

The most important memories to me involve 1. Those that taught me how to overcome challenges and reminded me to be patient with myself as I learn new things and 2. Those that pertain to coaching, supporting and encouraging the younger kids who look up to me. Most importantly, I continue to set an example for my little brother Gavin as he, too, works through his belts and is now a brown belt. We practice together at home, perform our routines for our parents and friends and family, and have fun making a lot of memories.

When I look forward to my life goals, my short-term goals (1-2yrs) include further training and dedication to advance to the next degree black belt as well as to balance my academics and strive for all A's. My long-term goals (3-5yrs) include continued advancement of my black belt, supporting and training students to encourage their passion and growth in karate, and, as I will be 14-16yrs old, I will be in high school and looking forward to driving, school dances, friends, academics, and really long term, I plan on preparing to become a veterinarian and have a family of my own.

Throughout the process of achieving my 2<sup>nd</sup> Degree Black Belt, my mom and dad have been there every step of the way, providing support and encouragement (and lots of drives back and forth to the various Dojos!). While my family supported from the sidelines, I could not have made it this far without the dedicated training and support Sensei Cosgrove and Black Belt peers.

***Alanna Skye,  
CONGRATULATIONS on earning your 2<sup>nd</sup> Degree Black Belt! We are so inspired by your dedication and perseverance; embracing your strengths to overcome weaknesses and never backing down. You looked the challenge in the eye and gave it a wink. Beauty. Brains. Black Belt.***





**Zachary Mayer**  
**Swedesboro**

I started Karate when my dad showed me the Swedesboro Dojo website. I really did not want to do it, but I eventually gave in and said yes. Little did I know this would be the decision that would change me.

We went to the first class of my karate journey on a sunny Monday afternoon.

We did the class and after that I knew that I was going to continue. One of my

favorite moments in the Dojo was my brown belt graduation. I finally felt like I

was moving up. Another one of my favorite moments was the rewarding

feeling of getting my first-degree black belt. A goal that I desire in karate

is to become an instructor, once I am eligible. Some people that encouraged me during this black belt training were Ben Pezzino, Alanna L,

Mr. Zak, Mr. Nolan, Ms. Natalie, Grayson Farrel and Sensei Amanda. The biggest encouragement to me was my family, my mom, dad and my

sister. They were always there when I was thinking about giving up.



***Congratulations on your achievement. We love watching your growth. With your passion and perseverance, you keep pushing even when things don't come easy. We are proud of you and look forward to seeing you achieve more milestones!***

***Love, Mom, Dad, Olivia and Nagy***



**Bryce McDonald**  
**Swedesboro**

I started karate when I was 4 years old as a little dragon. I advanced to basic a few years later. My favorite moment in the dojo was when I moved up to the advanced class and the most memorable was the start of black belt candidate training. I really enjoyed my first board breaking challenge too. My sister, brother, mom and dad have supported me along my karate journey. Sensei Grogan has been a great mentor along the way. My short-term karate goal is to complete candidate training and receive my black belt. My long-term karate goal is to reach second or even third degree black belt.



***Way to Go, Bryce!***

***We are SO proud of you! Watching you work hard, stay focused, and keep pushing forward has been awesome! This accomplishment is proof of your strength and dedication, and we couldn't be happier for you! Love you! Mom, Dad, Brayden & Molli***

**Michael Noble  
Pitman**

My life goals are to continue my journey doing Okinawa Karate as long as I can. I'm always trying to stay healthy by eating healthy and do my running when I'm at home. I would like to thank my wife Karla and my son Michael for their encouragement throughout my journey.

To my instructor Sensei Sickles, I thank you sir. To my fellow students thank you for your support and encouragement. The 8 weeks of intense training is well worth the pain and sweat in the end.

When my wife and I signed up our son in Pitman DoJo in the late 2020's I would watch him in his classes, after while I decided to go ahead and sign up too. My journey then started in the spring of 2022. My most favorite moments this time around would be getting to learn the SAI KATA. The board breaking challenges are always entertaining. Also seeing the other schools when we all get together for events are always memorable. Becoming a 2<sup>nd</sup> degree black belt and having my name on my belt for me will be the greatest achievement thus by far.

Thank You







## **Benjamin Pezzino**

### **Swedesboro**

My name is Benjamin Pezzino and I started practicing karate in June 2021. I enjoyed watching martial arts movies and was intrigued by the actors' skills. I wanted to be like them. After earning my black belt last year, I was introduced to a new level of techniques. In the past year, as I have learned newer and more difficult katas, combinations, and weapons, I have grown to love martial arts even more. My current favorite weapon is sai because the moves are so crisp and cool.



Some of my favorite moments in the dojo are when I help with the Dragons. I enjoy teaching them new things; watching them try their best always puts a smile on my face. One of my most memorable moments was doing my first mud run last fall. I thought crawling through the mud, running in the woods, climbing up the rope, and rolling tires were all so much fun. I was so dirty in the end!

I hope to continue practicing karate for the next few years, potentially earning my fourth-degree black belt. After high school, I hope to attend college and earn a degree in astronomy. It is my dream to work for NASA, study space, and maybe one day become an astronaut. I never could have done all of this without my number one supporter, my Gramps. My mom and dad are a close second because they helped me practice and prepare for candidate training. In the dojo, Zach Mayer, Mr. Zak, and Mr. Nolan helped me perfect my combinations and katas. Sensei Grogan always encourages me to work hard and never give up.

***Congratulations to Ben on his achievements in Karate. We are so proud of him in anything he does. He never gives up, a great asset to have. Continued success in all he does. Lots of love and support. Gramma & Gramps. ❤️❤️***

***Benjamin, Congratulations on achieving your second degree! You have shown amazing growth and dedication to reach your goal, and it has been amazing to watch your journey! We love you and are so proud of you! ~ Mom and Dad***





**Bianca Ponce**  
**Swedesboro**

At the age of 10, I am deeply passionate about karate. Just three years ago, the idea of earning a black belt seemed far beyond my reach. However, as I immersed myself in the art of karate, it became clear that this was the sport I wanted to pursue for years to come. Karate has not only strengthened me physically, but it has also sharpened my mind, teaching me resilience and focus.



Throughout my journey, I have been fortunate to receive immense support from many individuals. My parents, always encouraging and diligent, have driven me to every class and ensured I was fully prepared for each training session. I am also grateful to my sensei and instructors, whose guidance and mentorship have been invaluable.

Karate has taught me that with discipline, consistency, and unwavering effort, nothing is truly impossible.



## **Brayden Rogers Pitman**

My name is Brayden Rogers, and I am a Candidate for the karate program. I started karate around 2 years ago, 2022. I started karate because I grew up with karate. I used to do karate when I was young, I also watched a lot of karate movies, like “Karate Kid,” and “Cobra Kai.” Karate has always played a very important role in my mind. I’m so glad to be here and learning the art of karate, it’s such a fun experience for me and hope to get as far as I can.



Throughout my 2 years of being in the program, I’ve made countless memories. Some that I’m proud of, and some that I had wish I had done better. One memory that I am definitely proud of, is when I won my first ever board breaking competition. I knew I did good, but at that moment I was so shocked. I’m so glad that I participated in these board breaking competitions, because I was able to win one! Another memory that I’m happy about, is a mini tournament that I participated in. I did Kata, Board breaking, and Sparring. I was able to get 1st place in all of them! I was really excited when I did that because one memory I’m not too happy about, is my first ever mini tournament. I did board breaking, and sparring. I had placed 3rd in all of them, which was last place. I remember I was feeling so defeated, but I’m glad I made a comeback in the next one!

I plan to go as far as I can with karate, and I have goals that if I stick to, I can achieve. Some short term goals that I have, is become a black belt. I’m already going through training, so if I work hard enough, I’m sure I can achieve it. Another goal that I have, is to increase my stamina. This is more of a physical type goal, but I want to see a difference in the future. It’s one thing to be able to run 10 miles, and spar for 10 minutes. I only have 1 long term goal. Go far. Wherever it takes me is my goal, as long as I’m still doing karate. I’m proud to be here and I hope to still be here in the future.

Over the past 2 years, there has been important people in my life to get me to where I am today. Of course, I wouldn't be able to be here without my parents. Any time they felt that I wasn't feeling it, they kept pushing me to keep going, so I did. I would definitely not be here if it weren't for Sensei Sickles, he's the one that made me what I am today (karate wise). I would never have been able to make it without him. He's a very important person in these years I've been here, after all, he is my Sensei! My classmates are also very important, they help me when I need it and are very nice. A few of my friends and family have done karate too, and has encouraged me to keep going.

The karate program is a really nice place to be, to make memories, set new goals in life, and meet new people on your journey. I've always loved the thought of karate, it's always made its way into all my years. It has given me new goals to set in life and one day, I hope to achieve. And finally, the people I have met and encouraged me these past few years, I will never forget. Friends and family members have all done karate and not one has made it to where I am today. I'm proud to be a Candidate and hope that with enough effort, I'm able to earn a black belt. I thank my Sensei, and classmates everything you have done for me, karate will always have a spot in my in my life.



## Harman Singh Mullica Hill

My name is Harman Singh and I am 11 years old. I am currently in the 6th grade and go to Pleasant Valley School. I joined karate in Mullica Hill on May 11, 2021. I joined karate because I was interested in learning fighting techniques and wanted to get stronger. I went to for a trial class and here I am getting my 2nd degree!



It is hard to pick one favorite moment but one of them for sure is when I received my blackbelt last year as I thought it was something I thought I could not do. I also enjoy playing dodgeball and doing the obstacle courses. I must say that one of extreme favorite moments were when Sensei TJ carried me after I completed my black belt exam.

As for my goal in karate I would like to go as far as I can in Karate. I would like to hit a home run in baseball and get good grades in school. I would like to get into a good medical school to become an Eye Doctor!

All the people that supported me through my time at the dojo are Sensei TJ Coakley, Sensei Aidan Coakley, Sempai Randy Kane, Sempai Branden Kane and Sempai Chris Richard. The CIT members are also very supportive with helping us out when we are confused.

My parents supported me by bringing me everywhere I needed to be. They also persuaded me to continuing my karate after I got my 1st degree blackbelt. My mom is my biggest cheerleader and had total faith in me that I can do this!

***Harman we are, and always will be, so proud of the hard work you put in anything. But the dedication you have put in to achieving the 2nd degree black belt was truly astonishing. We are so proud of the determination and dedication you have put in to being able to do this, you have become such an amazing role model for the rest of your family members! Always be proud of yourself you are doing amazing in everything whether it is karate or school!***

***You were afraid of doing this the second time but the confidence you have built in yourself pushed you through flawlessly. Keep it up Harman we love you!***

***- Mom, Dad & Perleen***



**Chloe Smith**  
**Swedesboro**

I decided to try karate three years ago because I thought it would be fun to do it with my friend Mia and found I really enjoyed it. The most memorable event I participated in was board breaking I really enjoyed breaking the boards. I hope to expand my martial arts experience by trying jiu jitsu and muay thai in the future. I would like to thank my parents who supported and encouraged me by making sure I practiced and ran during these last few months as I prepared and participated in candidacy as well as making sure I got to class on time. I would also like to thank my friend Mia the reason I got into karate, who unfortunately broke her foot and was unable to come back. I would like to thank Sensei Grogan who pushed and supported me throughout my karate training and through these last 8 weeks. And thank you to Mr. Zak who pushed me to do my best and is always there to help when I need it.





## **Gabe Stankiewicz**

### **West Deptford**

Why did I start karate? I was always interested in martial arts and wanted to take it further by signing up. It took me years and months to convince my mom to let me start karate. We moved from Pennsylvania to West Deptford about 4 years ago, and after settling into our new home, my mom surprised me and my siblings with a karate class. I loved it so much! Putting on my gi for the first time made me feel like I was living life to the fullest. I was also excited to start with my siblings and felt like life couldn't improve. I have trained at the West Deptford OKKA Dojo for about 2.5 years.



One of my most memorable moments in the dojo was during my first in-school tournament. I was so nervous, especially during Kumite, when I had the opportunity to spar with Henry Damon, a 4th Degree Black Belt. I had no idea what to do, but Mr. Damon could have easily defeated me. Instead, he showed me some moves and gave me tips during the match. One of my short-term goals is to join the U.S. Military, and once I'm out, I want to continue my martial arts career with Hanshi Dargan and eventually become an instructor like them. In the long term, I want to teach what I've learned to others and carry on the martial arts tradition. I also plan to explore other martial arts and fighting styles to see what I can add and improve.

My parents and siblings have been the most supportive people, helping me overcome my fears of competing outside of OKKA tournaments and participating in events like the Egg Harbor Tournament and the Shotokan Tournament. Another great supporter is Hanshi Dargan, who has helped me through everything and with whom I have great conversations. He has also taught me how to be the best instructor I can be as a CIT member. Sempai Damon is another great supporter who has

taught me how to be a great instructor and with whom I have great conversations every night after classes.

***Gabe, Congratulations on your 1<sup>st</sup> degree black belt.  
Love, Moms***



## **Arjuna Sujit-Kumar**

### **Swedesboro**

When I was 3-years old I've started karate, then I got a bit scared, so I took a one-year break and joined back at 4 ½. My parents were interested in Karate, they decided to give me a chance to learn. One of my favorite moments are the board breaking challenges and the tournaments. The memorable moments, when I was a dragon, I've participated in the board breaking challenge and won the first board breaking champion badge. Since then, I find every opportunity to attend board breaking challenges and thoroughly enjoyed the experience.



In next 2 years, I will be interested in joining the Certified Instructor Training (CIT) to support classes, in addition to that my next karate goal is to prepare and receive the 2nd degree black belt while continue to participate in the board breaking challenge and tournaments to develop my skills and confidence.

The next 3-5 years, my goal is to learn new combination, kata, nunchaku, bow and new weapons. My Karate goal is to have fun, learn new skills, help others and continue to progress in black belt ranks. The people who helped me achieve this step to getting my black belt are sensei Amanda, all instructors at Swedesboro OKKA, my dad, my mom, my brother Arunan, my grandma and my karate friend Mason. I appreciate the support and encouragement I've received from all other candidates and parents during the black belt training.

Ready for 1<sup>st</sup> Belt Graduation at Dragon

**Oct' 2020**



Officially a Black Belt Candidate

**Oct' 2024**



Congratulations Arjuna on this well-deserved accomplishment of reaching this critical milestone in your Karate journey. Your hard work, drive and determination will serve you well and will for years to come. We are all very proud of you. Well done!

*Suit - Daddy, Amutha - Mommy and Arunan - Brother*

Very happy for your achievement Arjuna. Find your passion, work hard then the results will come. You rock!

*Krishnal - Grandma*

## Joseph Wehbe Swedesboro

My name is Joseph Wehbe, and I am currently undergoing Black Belt Candidate training at OKKA Swedesboro dojo so that I may to earn my 3rd degree black belt. I am honored and privileged to be able to have the opportunity to undergo this training. Karate has been a huge part of my life for the last 7 years. I started at the dojo in Little Dragon classes at the age of 4 when my parents decide to sign me up for karate. They thought it would help me with more discipline at that age. It was a new challenge for me at such a young time in my life. At first, I was not keen on the idea of doing karate as I was the oldest of my siblings, and the first to attend classes. But as I continued to attend the dojo and move up in my ranking as a karate student, I knew that karate was the right choice that was made for me. It has taught me so much. I have loved to do board breaking tournaments and compete in those challenges. I won title of board breaking Grand Champion at one point during my karate career. That was a highlight and something that I will never forget. In addition, other memorable points in my karate timeline include of course when I trained and became a 1st and 2nd degree black belt as well. Those were incredibly proud moments that I underwent. I achieved something for myself that no one else could have done for me, and no one else can take away from me. That is what makes it so unique and special. I received my 1st degree black belt when I was 8 and my 2nd degree black belt when I was 9.



I will also never forget when each of my three siblings started their karate classes. I just recently helped during my youngest brother's first karate class as a Little Dragon. I am also training for my 3rd degree black belt alongside my sister, who is training to earn her 1st degree black belt. These are moments that are so special to me and that I will never forget.

In thinking of my future in the next coming years, I hope to start looking at and applying to high schools and attending a high school that excels in academics. I hope to go to university after high school (I am shooting for Harvard!). I hope to one day become a lawyer, and either practice law, or use my degree for the good of humanity in some way. Of course, I would like to thank the people who have helped me achieve not only my karate goals, but who helped me with other achievements as well. I am forever grateful to my mother and father, whose love and support I could not do without during these times, and always. I have to thank my siblings to always being there for me as well, looking up to me and supporting me, attending karate classes or watching alongside when I was in class. I would also like to thank my sensei, Sensei Grogan, and all the staff and helpers at OKKA Swedesboro, for helping me during this crucial time of Black Belt training, as well as countless times before this. I am also indebted to my other fellow classmates during the Black Belt Candidate Training who are guiding me through this process as we support each other to achieve our goals.

Karate and the ideals and principals of OKKA have taught me discipline, to never give up, to challenge myself, and above all, respect and kindness towards others.







## **Petra Wehbe**

### **Swedesboro**

My name is Petra Wehbe and I am currently a black belt candidate undergoing the 8-week Candidate training at my home dojo, OKKA Karate in Swedesboro, under Sensei Grogan. I am currently 9 years old and in 4th grade in school. This will be my 6th year in karate at the dojo since I started at the age of 3 years old. My brother Joseph was already enrolled in Karate, and I was attending classes with him, so my parents decided to sign me up along with him in the Dragons classes. Those classes were my earliest memories of karate. My



parents also loved to enroll me in the karate tournaments and board breaking challenges. I remember being at the age of four at my first board breaking tournament in OKKA Pitman and winning that tournament by taking first place in my age group. I also recall another tournament that I participated in at my home dojo, where I did not win first place, but it being a very good learning experience for me. One of my fondest memories with karate will ever be the summer festival that we attended in June of 2021, when my sister Eliana did her very first karate class that day too! She did so well and I remember being so happy for her.

Of course, who cannot forget the times during COVID, and having to do karate virtually and then wearing masks in the dojo when we were allowed to go back in person.

I also recall when I was moved into the leadership classes and taking on the challenge of weapons and sparring. This was also a learning time for me, as I gained the courage to learn those weapons and spar with my fellow classmates. I learned to not be afraid and also to never give up. Karate is a great part of my life and I enjoy the challenges that the classes and the mission of karate have had to offer me over the years.

With karate, I hope to become a black belt this year. Academically I would like to excel in school and gets principal's list and good grades each year. Eventually I would like enter into middle school and get into a good high school. I hope to continue my career in karate as long as I can. As far as my future goes, I do not know exactly what I would like to achieve, but I know that I would like to go to a good university and have a career that is rewarding and fruitful, and of course to make my parents proud!

I would like to thank everyone that has helped me achieve my karate goals these last 6 years. This of course includes my mom and dad, as well as my siblings, Joseph, Eliana and Anthony. They have always been by my side and supported me, especially during this challenging time of Black Belt Candidate training. I could never have done it without their constant guidance and support. I will always be thankful for such a great karate sensei, Sensei Grogan, and all her support staff and helpers. I am also thankful for my fellow Black Belt Candidate students and friends that have been allowing me to achieve these goals.

I would not be the person that I am today without karate. I am a much different student than that 3 year old who was watching my brother's classes and was placed in karate that day in July of 2018. I am forever thankful for my parents' decision to enroll me in those classes. Karate has taught me discipline, how to face challenges that come my way, courage and above all, respect for others.



**Wilson Zhang**  
**Swedesboro**

Karate is a major part of my life, and I'm very glad that it is. It started as an activity my parents wanted me to do in the summer of 2021. After all, I was not very athletic. However, I wasn't upset about it because I was already inspired by martial arts done on social media. Soon, karate wasn't just an activity, but it became a part of me. It was fun and brought joy to me. I loved when we would play games like dodge ball and do stations of games near major holidays.



My favorite moment has to be my first graduation. I felt honored that I made my family very proud. This moment will be topped for when I reach the black belt.

None of this would have ever been possible without my parents support. It also wouldn't have been possible without all the instructors and Sensei. Friends that also did karate made it an enjoyable experience. People like Josh, Ben, and Oliver added much to karate. Their positivity and encouragement led to where I am today, a high brown belt.







**Jonathan Zippel**  
**Mullica Hill**

Hello, my name is Jonathan Zippel and I'm 10 years old. I am currently the rank of Shodan and going for the rank of Nidan. One of my favorite memories in the dojo is when it's my birthday and I get to do the gauntlet and get punched a bunch of times.

Someone who has helped me is Harman, we support each other during candidate training and all other events in the dojo. My brother Michael also helps me with my combinations, katas and weapons.



My goals for karate are to learn about karate and getting to the rank of Yondan.

Thank you to Sensei Aidan for pushing me to achieve my goals. I also want to thank my Mom and Dad for supporting me and bringing me to all my classes and events.

***Congratulations on the new rank of Nidan  
Jonathan.***

***We are extremely proud of all your hard work  
and dedication.***

***We love watching you achieve your goals.***

***Love you,***

***Dad, Mom, Faith, Brandon, Madison & Michael.***





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## The Goal Was Black Belt



