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Published April 27th, 2011 "The Way of the White Tiger" - East West Kung Fu of Lafayette By Sophie Braccini



Grandmaster Lee with Meghan Mannion-Gray, a first degree black belt (right), and Anna Winder, a second degree brown belt. Photo Sophie Braccini

Richard Lee's East West Kung Fu, which opened its doors in Lamorinda last February, is a haven for champions. The nine world champions and 20 national champions who work there practice six hours every week with Grandmaster Lee himself, in the system he invented - Bok Fu Do, 'the way of the white tiger.' Bok Fu Do is a synthesis of the four major schools of martial arts, Chinese, Japanese, Okinawan and Korean, that Lee studied all over the world. A trainer and teacher for 50 years, Lee's had schools in several locations, and opened the Lafayette school to accommodate a growing number of Lafayette students. Grandmaster Lee is world renown figure in his field, yet he is very approachable, calm and warm; a perfect embodiment of his 3000-year-old art.

Grandmaster Lee's story is a tale of epic proportions, impossible to summarize in a few words. It starts with an impoverished family and an abusive father who was a semi-professional boxer in Connecticut, then moves to California where a teenage Lee trained as swimmer while dreaming about the martial arts he had discovered by accident in the 1950s. It continues with his pursuit of martial arts, first with Al Tracy in the early 1960s in San Jose and with Kenpo legend Ed Parker, then to the growing success of his own school that he opened in Castro Valley upon becoming a Kenpo master himself in 1967. But Lee was not satisfied with the commercial success that his

school immediately found and he continued his search for perfection, embarking on a quest for knowledge that took him all over the world (visit his website, www.bokfudo.com, to read about his journeys.)

It is hard to pinpoint the root of Lee's motivation and determination. "My motivation is to become the best martial arts teacher in the world," says Lee, "when my students participate in a World Tournament they know that they deserve to win, because they have been through such an incredible training program." His staff and students boast impressive records, including his general manager, Morgan Newman. "I have been World Champion three times in a row," says Newman, "These championships happen every three years in a different country. Each country sends its 17 best martial artists, who are selected during national championships."

The school is welcoming to people of all ages and aspirations. "Our students are adults and children alike," says John Buckley, a student of Lee for 25 years, now a Master himself and the trainer of the U.S. team, "It has something to offer to everybody in a friendly and congenial atmosphere. The vast majority of our adult students have families and careers, they look for a positive outlet and can come for as little as once a week to once every day; they study at their own pace and the teachers respect that." Buckley explains that the technique is not abrasive to the body, it promotes flexibility, strengthens muscles, takes the student on an incredible emotional journey and stimulates the brain. "You feel cleansed," says Buckley, "you are mentally and emotionally rewarded."

East West Kung Fu offers classes six days a week to children, adults and families. The first trial class is one on one and free, from there potential students decide what they want to pursue.

Richard Lee's East West Kung Fu

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