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Sunday, January 16, 2005

**Spotlight: Robert Brown**

## Berkley teacher empowers, inspires

Born with cerebral palsy, the four-time black belt now teaches martial arts to others.

By Marisa Schultz / The Detroit News

**BERKLEY** -- As a kid with leg braces and cerebral palsy, Robert Brown didn't seem cut out to become a black belt in martial arts.

But by age 12, Brown built up so much strength from martial arts training that he shed the leg braces and later earned four black belts.

These days, the 39-year-old Beverly Hills man serves as an inspiration not only to his students at his School of Chinese Martial Arts in Berkley, but also to area youngsters who have had to overcome similar obstacles.

Partnering with Starfish Family Services in Inkster, a private, nonprofit agency aimed at strengthening families, Brown coordinated free summer programs with the help of Eastern Martial Arts of Walled Lake to teach kung fu to more than 300 low-income students. Martial arts is "one of the greatest workouts you will have, and it will also teach you very practical self-defense," Brown said. "People are rarely attacked on a day-to-day basis physically, but we are attacked verbally."

Brown's philosophy is to focus on mind, body and spirit. The goal is for martial arts to provide discipline and self-understanding that can help with daily decisions and actions.

Brown often volunteers to teach women's self-defense classes, martial arts classes for local police departments and children's programs, said Jeri



Elizabeth Conley / The Detroit News

**Robert Brown demonstrates a move during a beginner kung fu class in Berkley. Brown earned four black belts.**

### Robert Brown

**Age:** 39

**Residence:** Beverly Hills

**Occupation:** Owner of the School of Chinese Martial Arts in Berkley

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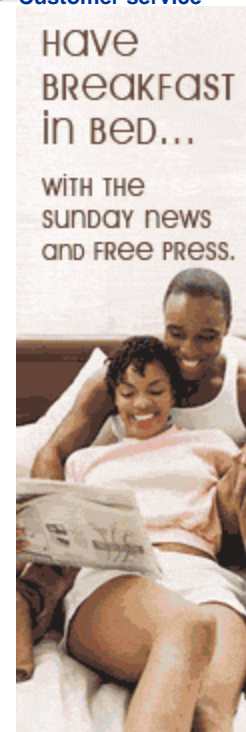
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Donahue, program coordinator for Brown's school.

For the summer kung fu program, students ages 5-15 gained knowledge of not only martial arts but also life skills such as patience, perseverance, empathy and delayed gratification, according to Starfish officials.

Brown's personal story of overcoming adversity provided great inspiration to the kids, many of whom have worked to overcome obstacles in their lives. "Starfish is always looking for creative partnerships," said Al Sebastian, Starfish's spokesman. "And kung fu was a fun and wonderful way to teach life skills."

Born with cerebral palsy and dyslexia, Brown found himself in a world that was not tolerant of disabilities. Kids made fun of him, and Brown's self-esteem was in the doldrums.

Karate empowered him. By puberty, he could run and jump and wanted to break boards. Around age 20, the spiritual side of the martial arts set in. Martial arts was no longer just about blocking and kicking.

Brown started traveling the country and practicing with different instructors. Later he ventured to China, Japan and India for practice and ended up with an understanding of the deepest spiritual aspects of martial arts.

About 13 years ago, Brown decided to share what he learned with others by opening the School of Chinese Martial Arts. He opened the school in Berkley at Woodward Avenue and 12 Mile.

Brown has taken his teaching one step further. On his own time, Brown developed "Lessons in Mindfulness," a martial arts curriculum that puts the emphasis on the deeper and more spiritual meaning rather than on fighting. His program is now taught in schools around the world, he said.

"I get through the day sometimes by knowing I will be somewhere (after work) where I'm respected."

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