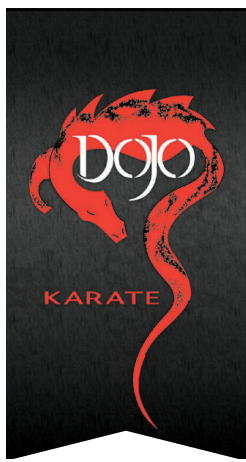


▶ DOJO KARATE

Where champions are born



By Brenda Erdahl

Peter Karels was three years old when he broke his first board. He and his family were visiting the Wright County Fair, and they happened upon the Dojo Karate booth.

“He broke a board, bounced in the bounce house and got a coupon for a free lesson, so we stopped by (the Dojo) and never looked back,” his dad Nathan Karels said.

That wasn't quite 10 years ago but Peter, a seventh grader at Buffalo Community Middle School, has already come a long way. He was just seven when he earned his first-degree black belt and two years later advanced to second-degree black belt. That's when he started competing.

That first year of competition he was ranked No. 1 in two nine and under black belt divisions (overall traditional forms and weapons and point sparring) in the North Central Karate Association's Minnesota Regional Circuit. He was also Black Belt Grand Champion in the 11 and under division at Dojo Karate's Tournament of Champions.

Since then, he's competed in state, national and even world competitions and he has more trophies, plaques and awards than he knows what to do with.

During the 2024 season, he attended 19 tournaments and earned a trophy or medal in all but one of them. The highlight of that season and his career came when he earned the right to represent Team USA at the World Karate Commission Worlds in Albufeira, Portugal.

To get there, he had to place in the top eight at a regional



At Dojo Karate in Buffalo students are inspired to become champions and leaders of their own lives. Pictured above are some of those high achievers. From left are instructors Logan Woehner and Cash Hourscht, World Karate Commission Worlds qualifier Peter Karels, instructor Donald Low and Master Chris Hourscht.

qualifier and then in the top four at a national qualifier.

Peter loves setting goals (he plans on being a fifth-degree black belt by the time he is 23), learning the curriculum and the overall workout he gets from karate, but most of all, it's fun, he said.

It's not everyday that Dojo Karate produces a student who competes at the level Peter does, but that's always the Dojo goal – to create champions and to create leaders. Dojo

Karate in Buffalo is successful at both.

Like Peter, many other Dojo students were introduced to karate at an early age. Some have gone on to be great competitors, others have worked their way through the belts and are now teaching the next generation.

Donald Low joined Dojo Karate in March of 2006. He was just four years old. Today he's working on his third-degree black belt and is employed as a head instructor.

▶ DOJO KARATE

“My parents wanted me to do martial arts to teach me discipline and respect,” he said. “I loved it!”

When other kids his age were watching cartoons, he was watching Walker Texas Ranger and envisioning himself as the next Chuck Norris. Between Norris and his uncle who was a police officer, he knew just what he wanted to do when he grew up. After high school, he attended Alexandria Technical College and earned a degree in law enforcement. Now he's teaching at Dojo in Buffalo and he's loving every minute of it.

“Seeing students' growth is really rewarding. It's a really good feeling to see how far they have come”

– Logan Woehner
 DOJO Instructor

“He's a natural teacher,” Dojo Master Chris Hourscht said. “It's so much fun to see how far he's come. He's a nice testimony to what martial arts can do for people.”

Low said he loves the community at Dojo Karate, he's made many friends over the years and that's part of the reason he returned to teach. Today he leads martial arts classes at both the Buffalo and Monticello dojos.

“It takes discipline to advance in rank and it's not easy. It's important to have good relationships and students find that here,”

Hourscht said.

To 16-year-old Cash Hourscht karate is a lifestyle, and he wouldn't have it any other way. The son of Master Chris Hourscht, Cash has been practicing martial arts since he was 2 ½ years old and is currently working on his third-degree black belt. He enjoys learning new tricks and kicks, weapons and the feeling of achievement and self-improvement that comes with every new skill mastered and belt achieved.

Karate has brought Cash out of his shell. “I'm still quiet, but it's helped me to be more comfortable talking to people and leading people,” he said.

Dojo instructors kept him motivated while making learning fun and now he's trying to do the same for the next generation. He's been teaching at Dojo off and on for the last couple of years, but recently Mr. Low has taken him under his wing and he's beginning to realize he just might want to follow in his dad's footsteps.

Cash is a sophomore and A student at Buffalo High School where he plays for the Bison baseball team. Baseball is his other passion, he said and joked if the major leagues don't come calling, it's very possible he'll make owning a dojo and teaching karate a career.

Other Dojo students like Logan Woehner, found you don't have to start karate at a young age to be inspired by the Dojo lifestyle. He was 21 years old in February of 2023 when he began his martial arts journey.

Like the others, he was encouraged by his parents who wanted him to get involved and grow



Twelve-year-old Peter Karels represented Team USA at the World Karate Commission Worlds in Albufeira, Portugal in 2024. He is a student at Dojo Karate in Buffalo.

socially. His sisters had joined Dojo the fall before and he found himself driving them to class.

“After a few practices I got into it myself,” he said. “I liked seeing the progress I was making as well as the people. I wasn't involved in anything else at the time and I liked the community here. It was very freeing to me. I've seen a lot of mental and physical growth.”

It took him about two years to get to where he is now, advanced brown belt, but he won't be there long. With any luck, he'll be testing for his black belt in May.

About a year ago, he started assisting in his sisters' classes, hoping to improve his leadership

skills and now he is a fulltime instructor at Dojo.

“Seeing students' growth is really rewarding. It's a really good feeling to see how far they have come,” he said.

Woehner is a testament to the fact that you don't have to start karate at a young age to be successful at it. He's seen students as young as 2 ½ to as old as 60 or 70 join and experience the difference martial arts can make in their lives.

“All of them acknowledge a big change in attitude and physical performance,” he said.

Master Hourscht who launched

his first Dojo in 2000 and has since grown that number to 10, said not every student who walks through his door is going to be a martial arts champion or a teacher.

“Some want to take it to that care er level and own their own dojo. It's been a very rewarding career for me, and I like to mentor and grow those students into the industry if that's what they want,” he said.

He is confident, however, that all those who walk through his door will leave with the skills they need to be both a champion and a leader on whatever path life takes them down.



Twelve-year-old Peter Karels, center, is an inspiration to the youngsters at Dojo Karate in Buffalo. Through hard work and discipline, he has become a world class martial arts competitor.



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