



Impact - Jane Manktelow shows off Go-Kan-Ryu Picture: MAT BROOMFIELD

# Why GKR is alive and kicking

A STYLE of martial arts is revolutionising the lives of women all over Essex as they discover an inner strength they never knew existed.

Go-Kan-Ryu (GKR) is a traditional Japanese style of karate practised every week by 850 students across the county in Southend, Leigh, Canvey, Basildon, Langdon Hills and Pitsea.

What is unusual about the non-contact style is that 40 per cent of members are women, which is more than any other style.

GKR, founded in 1984, is now one of the most popular karate organisations in the world, with more than 40,000 students taking part in classes in Australia, New Zealand, the UK and the USA.

Mat Broomfield, an instructor for the past three years, believes there are numerous factors, not just fitness, that have made the sport particularly appeal to women.

"It has so many benefits that people aspire to in life," says Mat.

"It helps builds confidence, self-esteem and discipline and

**ANITA PATTERSON** discovers a martial art which treats women as absolute equals

Pictures: **RON POULTER**

it enables many women to find their inner strength that they may not have known they had."

Mat says GKR treats both genders as equals.

"It is also a tool to help empowerment," he adds.

"In GKR everyone is completely equal whether they are a man or a woman.

"Many students start as spectators before getting involved and later going on to become instructors.

"When women see other women in the class it makes them feel comfortable and safe."

The style focuses on the basics kata (patterns) and kumite (sparring).

Strong emphasis is also placed on etiquette, loyalty and respect that carries through to

each instructor and student. Classes are very family-oriented and parents can actually train with their children - providing yet another plus factor for women.

Instructors are accredited and have gone through rigorous police checks.

They also take weekly lessons to ensure they are able to work with the public in the most professional manner.

GKR is open to women of all ages and fitness levels.

For more information, contact senior instructor Jason Smith on 07659 594701 or visit the website.

WEB LINK

[www.gkrkarate.com](http://www.gkrkarate.com)

## Maggie says years are no barrier

AGE is an excuse, not a barrier, says 56-year-old Maggie Murphy.

The grandmother, who lives in Leigh, has been taking part for two years and is now an instructor.

"I had done some high-impact aerobics in the past and wanted to try something else," she says.

"I think exercise is great for women, especially when they are going through the menopause and are suffering from mood swings.

"Physical activity really helps to lift them out of the depression.

"If you can do it at my age, a younger woman will have no problems.

"People used to annoy me by saying I was a bit old to be doing karate but I don't feel old.

"It is very family-orientated and I love that.

"I have my own family at



■ Maggie Murphy - the golden rule home but I am part of this larger extended family."

Maggie says the golden rule is to make newcomers feel welcome.

"When you come in and know no one you feel like a wally and can be very anxious," she adds.

"I take people under my wing so they do not feel alone."

## How Leanne struck gold

BATTLING cancer didn't stop 16-year-old school girl Leanne Denham from winning a gold medal in the world championships of GKR.

Leanne, who is currently studying for her GCSEs at Furtherwick Park School in Canvey, has been doing GKR since 2001.

The Pitsea teenager was diagnosed with a rare cancer affecting the spine as a child and while she is now in remission, the illness has had side-effects which have been helped by the art.

"Before I started I really had a confidence issue and was bullied at school," says Leanne.

"I lost my hair when I had chemotherapy and the side-effects I have suffered include irritable bowel syndrome and collapsed veins as well as marks on my legs and stomach.

"My brother did GKR when we were young and I always wanted to do it.

"Then one day someone knocked on the door and asked me to join.

"I met loads of friends and even met my boyfriend Scott at a class."



■ Leanne Denham - battler

She says GKR has helped to build up muscles which were affected by the cancer.

Her mum Barbara has since taken up GKR as well, and is now an instructor.

"Last year I took part in the world championships and won a gold medal for fighting," says Leanne.

"Next year I am going to defend my title in Australia if I get in the team.

"GKR is a big part of my life now.

"I used to train seven days a week and travel across the county to classes, but now have cut it down to four days as I am doing my exams."

## 'Martial art led to miracles for Ricky and me'

TAKING classes in GKR not only changed Julie Sharp's life but also the life of her eight-year-old son Ricky.

Ricky suffers from the muscle disorder dyspraxia so Julie, from Grays, initially took him to GKR lessons to help build up his muscles.

Eventually she decided to have a go herself.

Two years on, she is a brown belt as well as an instructor.

"At first I felt silly but gradually I got better and better and now I teach my own class in Pitsea," says Julie, who is in her 40s.

"I started out by helping in Mat's class and had the option of taking my own class but there was no pressure.

"I love meeting people and really enjoy myself.

"The majority of students in my class are



■ Julie Sharp - grinning

women and I think that helps attract more women as they feel comfortable.

"When I think about what I have achieved I just start grinning from ear to ear.

"Also it has helped Ricky to such a point that he has been discharged from physio and therapy, which we never thought would happen."

## Practice makes perfect for Vickie

VICKIE Allen, 37, of Langdon Hills, has lost two stone in weight since she started GKR two years ago and says it has changed her life.

From just going along to watch her four children take part, Vickie has gone on to become a sensei (instructor) and attends classes four times a week.

"I was very worried at first as I couldn't get a grasp of it but my kids helped me," she says.

"I am now totally hooked.

The key to success is practice and determination.

"It keeps you fit and it's fun. Before I started I used to be out of breath just getting up from a chair but now I don't feel like that anymore.

"As a woman, it is also great to be able to defend yourself."



■ Vickie Allen - key

## A boost for confidence

AFTER just three years of taking classes in GKR, 40-year-old Jane Manktelow (pictured above) has achieved success she could once only dream about.

As well as being an instructor in the Langdon Hills class, the mother-of-two clinched a gold medal in the GKR world championship last May as well as a gold in the national championship.

"I got involved through my daughter Emma and then my son Jamie," says Jane, from Hornchurch.

"I just went along to watch and thought it looked brilliant - then I decided I would give it a go.

"I had to pluck up the courage as the class was full of kids but I am so glad I did.

"I really think anyone can do it.

"You don't have to be particularly fit and you can be any size, shape or age to do it."

So confident is Jane that anyone can do it that she has even introduced her 72-year-old mum Betty to GKR.

"It has given me so

much confidence," says Jane.

"When we have gradings I have to stand in front of 40 to 50 people and that is something I would never have dreamed I could do before I started doing GKR.

"It is great socially and I have made a lot of friends from the classes that I would not have made otherwise.

"I feel very lucky to have got involved with the classes.

"Through them I have met a lot of very inspirational people."