

Teen has a winning outlook

By Debbie LaPlaca
CORRESPONDENT

On or off mat, SHRHS junior finds balance



T&G Staff/PAUL KAPTEYN

Charlton resident and karate champion Danielle Morelli, 16, spars with teammate Daniel Palacios at McCoy's Action Karate in Auburn.

CHARLTON — Brains, brawn and beauty: Meet 16-year old Danielle Morelli.

Despite possessing the height and stature of a runway model, this 6-foot-tall teenager has her feet firmly planted in the pursuit of science and disciplined physical training. Danielle, a junior at Shepherd Hill Regional High School and the daughter of Paul and Donna Morelli, says she "loves math, science and chemistry" and aspires to a

career in forensic science. She is a member of the school's math team, and enjoys using her brains to compete against other minds.

Oh, yes — and she is also a Tang Soo Do black belt and a trophy-winning competitor.

Four afternoons a week, Danielle leaves school for McCoy's Action Karate in Auburn where she works as a receptionist, assists as a junior instructor and trains as a stu-

dent enrolled in the adult program.

"I balance it pretty well," Danielle said of how she manages a full schedule of school and karate.

Until October, Danielle's tournament experience consisted of interschool and regional competitions. Her first major tournament was the Mohegan Sun Nationals, a Krane Ratings International Inc. five-star competition held Oct. 22. Danielle

took home the first-place trophy for sparring in her division of 16- to 17-year-old girls.

"It was exhilarating. She could have lost and it still would have been good," Mrs. Morelli said of the tournament.

Sparring is a fierce element of karate training, which requires both skill and proper form in the techniques necessary to win a match.

Turn to Karate/Next Page



Heritage T&G

Serving Southern
Worcester County
and Northeastern
Connecticut

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2005

A PUBLICATION OF THE TELEGRAM & GAZETTE



T&G Staff/PAUL KAPTEYN

Charlton resident and karate champion Danielle Morelli takes a breath after a sparring session at the dojo in Auburn.

Karate champ balances full plate

Karate/From Previous Page

"This was no small feat for a first time at a Krane tournament," Mr. Morelli said proudly of his daughter's win.

Danielle found karate after many years of dance lessons, which she began at the age of 2.

"When I was in dance, I was always the chubby kid in the back," she said.

Following her brother, sister and father, Danielle enrolled at McCoy's, where her ability to excel in karate gave her the confidence and determination to reach her level of achievement.

Danielle has now been training at McCoy's for more than six years with her father and her siblings Dominick, 12, and Marisa, 10.

"It is a great way for the family to do something together," Mr. Morelli said.

The family quest began when Mr. Morelli made a pact with his children to "invest in something" and stick with it. All four have since earned black belts and continue to train at McCoy's, where Mr. Morelli is now the school's program director.

Danielle steps out of her roles as recep-

tionist and student to become an assistant instructor with an affinity for working with children.

"I love helping people, especially the little kids who give you a hug when you're done," Danielle said.

As part of the Future Instructor Student Training program, she will be attending instructors' college in Orlando this month to gain teaching certification. She may then transition to paid staff instructor at McCoy's.

Years of karate training have taught Danielle more than form and technique as she strives to live by the tenets of Tang Soo Do: "Integrity, concentration, perseverance, respect and obedience, self-control, humility and indomitable spirit."

"It helped me to understand more concepts in the real world. I don't feel sheltered," she said, adding, "I think it's made me more of a people person."

While Danielle was realizing her dream of receiving a black belt in May 2004, her family was moving from Oxford to Charlton.

As with the tenets of Tang Soo Do, a guiding principle was also found in her

new high school's mission statement: "Committed to excellence with pride and unity."

When asked what her new friends at Shepherd Hill thought of her karate skills, she said, "My friends think it's wicked cool."

According to Mr. Morelli, family-owned McCoy's has more than 450 students between the Auburn and Spencer locations and is ranked in the top 40 Karate Black Belt schools in the nation by United Professionals Inc., a support organization for martial arts schools. The sign above the school entrance in Auburn reads, "We're here to change the world one student at a time."

The chubby kid in the back of dance class has blossomed into an accomplished karate competitor who will be joining the national tournament circuit in February. Her enthusiasm and commitment to the discipline grows as she continues training, competing and pursuing instructor certification.

Danielle summarized her first major tournament win with an affirmation. "Success does feel good," she said.