

THE WAY OF THE WARRIOR



Bill Odom has commanded some of the Army's most elite soldiers. Now he's teaching local residents — including the editor of this paper — how to become warriors of a different sort.

YOU CAN DO IT!

That's what the direct-mail flier assured me as I stared at it one evening last September while I sat slumped in my favorite easy chair with a beer in hand.

I promise to make you a martial artist!

I have to admit, I was intrigued. I'd always been drawn to the martial arts. I like the combination of grace and power that are at the heart of karate, judo and related disciplines. I have a long-standing interest in Eastern philosophy. And, as silly as it may seem, I still harbor the boyhood fantasy of being able to flatten two or three bad guys with ease, at lightening speed.

But I also had two good reasons to doubt the claim.

First, I'm a skeptic — especially when it comes to ads promising personal transformation of one sort or another. Chalk it up to experience with those Charles Atlas propositions in the back pages of 1960s comic books — the ones that appealed to the 98-pound weakling cowering inside most of us — and to the self-help books that became so popular a decade later. In the end, I concluded long ago, they are all the same — big on motivational language but short on substance.

BY TOM ROBOTHAM PHOTOS BY KATHY KEENEY