



# Nobody Bothers Them

For many Arlingtonians, all roads lead to Jhoon Rhee Tae Kwon Do.

**MASTER FRANCIS** Pineda, a sixth-degree black belt who combs his hair with a razor blade, stands toe-to-toe with an 8-year-old, looks him dead in the eye, and screams, “NO! YOU CANNOT HAVE MY LUNCH MONEY!”

A room packed with kids breaks into fits of laughter.

Pineda smiles and bows to his faux foe. “Now you try,” he instructs encouragingly, turning toward a sea of red-uniformed students in an attempt to show them,

through role play, that sometimes the best self-defense is to turn up the volume.

“We tell you to use loud voices because bullies and strangers are scared of loud kids,” says Pineda.

At Jhoon Rhee Tae Kwon Do, located on the lower level of the Lee Harrison Shopping Center, the mission is to teach “life skills”—integrity, respect for self and others, discipline, perseverance—through martial arts. Pineda alternates lead and assistant teaching roles with

Master Barry Shackelford, a clean-cut, fifth-degree black belt, who founded the school in March 2005. They became business partners in 2006.

“I had known of Francis through competition,” says Shackelford, “but it wasn’t until I talked to my wife’s cousin about opening up a school in Arlington [that] we actually got to know each other.”

That cousin? Chun Rhee, son of Grand Master Jhoon Rhee, who is credited with popularizing tae kwon do in the

■ familiar faces

States. Chun, who runs a sister studio in Falls Church, is also the winking child star of “*Nobody bother me either!*” fame—the one from the ’70s-era commercial advertising his father’s studios.

But it wasn’t his wife’s family that first turned Shackelford onto tae kwon do. He tried it as an 11-year-old and discovered that it gave him both personal strength and a sense of purpose. “My older brother was a better athlete, smarter, better looking,” he claims, “but he was not doing this. Tae kwon do was a way to differentiate myself.” At 15, he became the youngest black belt in the history of his school—an accomplishment his own son, Braden, would later achieve at the age of 9.

Shackelford attended Virginia Tech, where he met his future wife, Heather, who is Grand Master Rhee’s niece. They now have two children—Braden, a sixth-grader at Swanson Middle School;

and Jenna, a red belt and fourth-grader at Taylor Elementary). After earning a master’s in counseling psychology from Radford University in 1992, he returned to the D.C. area and went to work for COPE Inc., offering crisis counseling and intervention while teaching at Chun Rhee’s schools on the side.

A dozen years later, on-the-job stress had taken its toll. He decided to put his psychology degree to work by reaching out to people at the beginning—rather than the end—of their ropes.

Like Shackelford, Pineda was also a child prodigy. Growing up in Fort Washington, Md., he studied Bruce Lee on Saturday morning TV. As a 10-year-old, he enrolled in the Jhoon Rhee studio in Marlow Heights, earning his black belt by the time he was 13. At 17, he became the youngest person to manage a Jhoon Rhee studio, in Glenn Dale, Md., and enrolled in college

at UMBC. By 24, he was the youngest master in the Jhoon Rhee system.

Pineda later moved to Arizona, where he studied computer networking and landed a tech job with Cisco, thinking that a traditional desk job might provide a nice change of pace. He couldn’t have been more wrong. During his two years on the “financial fast track,” he says he was miserable, sedentary and unfulfilled.

“I gained 40 pounds. I felt like I was dying inside,” he recalls, explaining what prompted his return to the East Coast, where he now spends his free time snowboarding and amping up crowds at Redskins games as the flag runner team’s captain. This past January, he married Elizabeth Harr, whom he met at the studio when her older son, Alex, was enrolled in the Knee-High Ninjas program. (Alex is now a black belt and a sixth-

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grader at Williamsburg; their younger son, Anderson, is a gold belt and in first grade at Nottingham.)

Shackelford and Pineda acknowledge that tae kwon do isn't a sport for dabblers. It's a major commitment. How do you get kids who are already overscheduled to keep coming back for a program that's not cheap and requires attendance two or three times per week?

"We devised a program for younger kids who are at a very impressionable age," Pineda says. "If you talk about cleaning their room, using polite words, getting good grades, we're setting the example for [what's expected of] them. Everything is modeled through positive reinforcement."

Somebody other than your mom telling you to clean your room? Now that's something parents will fit into their schedules.

Following a code of "integrity and honesty," the partners say their shared values are one secret to the studio's success. It also has an unspoken cool factor. (At birthday parties, kids get to break boards with their hands. Plus, Pineda was a model and choreographer for a tae kwon do-based video game.)

But in a packed observation room one Tuesday afternoon, Arlington mom Marcy Gessel points out something even more important: "For some kids, this is life-changing," she says, noting significant leaps in the confidence, self-control and self-awareness of the kids she's seen in class, including her three sons.

Progression through the ranks also includes both public speaking and community service components. "When we did our cereal drive for the Arlington Food Assistance Center in 2011, we collected more than 2,000 boxes," says

Shackelford. "The cereal aisle at Harris Teeter was wiped out."

With so many families rolling through their doors, it's no surprise that both instructors are well-known in Arlington. "If I drop off my kids in the morning and stop by Starbucks to get my wife a coffee...I run into at least two or three parents in line," Shackelford says. "Even if I don't physically wear my black belt, I have to keep it in mind. You have to walk the walk all the time."

Pineda picks up this thread: "I can't take five steps without running into a student. I know they recognize me, so that creed is always in my head. Our motto is to lead by example." ■

*Arlington-based freelance writer Adrienne Richard-Edds is a regular contributor. She writes Arlington Magazine's "What's in Store" style column.*

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