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DOO JANG
Arlington

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Arlington



Catering to an UPSCALE Clientele

BY HERB BORKLAND

Photos by Michelle Hayes, Sweet Lime Portrait Design, Arlington, VA

Suppose you opened up in a major shopping center full of kid-friendly businesses inside a neighborhood surrounded by schools catering to some of America's best-educated and most affluent families? Obviously, then, everyday meat-and-potatoes martial arts instruction won't do. So, what does it take to make Jhoon Rhee Tae Kwon Do of Arlington one of America's smartest operations? According to co-owners Barry Shackelford and Francis Pineda, it requires the "*height of professionalism.*"



Arts and Smarts

To appreciate Jhoon Rhee Tae Kwon Do of Arlington, and to judge whether it is perhaps one of the smartest schools in America, it helps to know something about its location, Arlington, Virginia.

Arlington is an urban county of roughly 26 square miles located directly across the Potomac River from Washington, DC. Here are the Pentagon, Arlington National Cemetery, the Iwo Jima Memorial and Georgetown

University. In 2006, Arlington was America's "most educated city" and ranked among 20 U.S. counties with "the highest median household income."

Jhoon Rhee Tae Kwon Do of Arlington bases its name on Grandmaster Jhoon Rhee, the celebrated "Father of American Tae Kwon Do." It opened in 2005 in the lower level of the Lee Harrison Shopping Center under the co-ownership of two Jhoon Rhee stalwarts: Master Barry Shackelford and Master Francis

Pineda. Today, by any measure, their dojang, boasting over 500 active students, is among our industry's most successful schools.

"Upper income parents care more about [their children's] education and activities," Shackelford stipulates. "They take a more active interest, so kids coming in are already [primed to be good students]."

Pineda sees his school's success partly due to what the staff and their





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students’ parents share in common. “[Our professional and educational backgrounds] reinforce an ability to be a people person, especially in martial arts customer service. [It’s] the ability to understand, ‘What does this kind of kid need from martial arts?’”

Shackelford and Pineda met formally for the first time in 2005. Both were highly educated and experienced at teaching martial arts (see their individual bios in the sidebar accompanying this article). Shackelford was in the middle of a career change and Pineda was teaching at several schools, waiting to possibly open his own school at a different location.

Professionalism = Success

What has fueled the Arlington school’s success from the start has been impeccable professionalism, the sort that must be learned, like excellent martial arts skills, in the finest venues, from the best people.

Shackelford acknowledges, “I worked [as a licensed professional counselor] for twelve years in very professional environments – the federal government, NASA – and in those environments, you have to conduct yourself in a very professional manner.”

“We are hard-wired martial artists,” Pineda goes on. “I always wanted to be an instructor, not a business person. But I’ve taught in maybe ten schools, and I steer away from the bad habits you encounter in a lot of studios. Stay active and proactive. Laziness – letting some teenager take over – and get-rich-quick schemes are downfalls. We teach employees to be well-rounded and active.”

Their friendly, polished manners show themselves in the way the co-owner/operators take turns speaking clearly and to the point, citing facts. They never get in each other’s way, but always reinforce

and support what the other partner is saying. To outward appearances, it's a partnership made in heaven.

"Our employees are also college-educated," Shackelford says. "The staff and main instructors are older adults with an air of professionalism. Professionalism is synonymous with respect.

"We also treat our employees in a professional manner. We provide excellent pay and benefits, like a retirement plan for which the company matches three percent, health/dental insurance with all premiums paid by the company, and paid vacation time for salaried employees."

Location Heaven

Chun Rhee, Jhoon Rhee's remarkable son, runs a highly-successful school

of his own in Falls Church, Virginia, four miles away from the Arlington location. Pineda and Shackelford credit Chun with modeling their original business plan. After Shackelford discovered the location, Chun Rhee confirmed that he believed it was ideal. The address is in a highly-populated area with lots of academic schools within a few miles' radius.

Shackelford itemizes some of the pluses: "The [Lee Harrison Shopping] Center has a Harris Teeter [upscale groceries], nice restaurants and kid-friendly businesses. We're on the lower level with a kids' book store, a kids' fitness center and a photo shop that works with kids. Some people have started referring to this as Kids' Mall."

The dojang opened on the Center's second level, where it's harder for walk-by customers to notice. Although they borrowed their fee schedule from Chun Rhee's operation, Shackelford and Pineda began by charging a little less. They also offered one short-lived promotion: Two students – you and your brother or a friend – for the price of one. That deal lasted for less than four months. By then, the good word was already spreading around about the school.

"When we ask, 'How did you hear about us?'" says Shackelford, "it's always by referrals."

What does the Arlington school offer walk-in parents and their children?

Shackelford itemizes the plan: "Four week intro, two classes a week for \$149, including a uniform. This gives parents a chance to see a change at home [in the child's behavior]. The time and money commitment is stressed. And parents get the full flavor of their commitment."

An Accessible Curriculum

What is it, then, that this particular school offers which is so special the most-educated families in the country can't stop recommending it to each other?



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Black Belt College Men

Virginia-born Barry Shackelford is a master twice-over. Originally a black belt from a small school in Danville, Virginia, he earned his Jhoon Rhee black belt in 1987 under Jhoon Rhee legend Charlie Lee and, two years later, received his bachelor’s degree in Psychology at Virginia Tech.

Later that same year, he relocated to the District of Columbia to become the head instructor at the large and busy Georgetown Jhoon Rhee Institute. In 1992, a 3.9 GPA led to his Master’s degree in Counseling Psychology. He obtained licensing as a Professional Counselor and, for the next 12 years, worked as a contractor to various federal-government agencies including NASA, the National Park Service and others, while continuing to instruct at

various first-tier Jhoon Rhee locations in Virginia.

From the late 1980s to early ‘90s, Shackelford stood nationally ranked as one of the top four competitors in both Korean forms and super-lightweight sparring. In 1994, as his biography notes, “He became more than just a student of Jhoon Rhee by entering the family when he married Heather Chun, whose mother, On Goo Chun, is Jhoon Rhee’s sister.”

Shackelford retired from the tournament circuit in 2000, the year his son was born.

D.C. native Francis Pineda, Shackelford’s partner, holds a B.S. degree in Biology, with a minor in Psychology, as well as a B.A. in AOS in Network Engineering. He received his first Jhoon Rhee black belt in 1984. He started teaching at the Marlow Height location under the tutelage of

ex-full-contact champion Michael Coles. After teaching at several Jhoon Rhee’s schools in the D.C. area, he became the manager and head instructor of the Glenn Dale, VA location. From 1993-95, Pineda served as manager and head instructor of the big Georgetown operation.

Ranking in the top ten nationally for five straight years in forms and sparring, Pineda became a sponsored member of Team Otomix and Team Prestige. Founder and captain of the University of Maryland’s Sport Karate Team, he’s also trainer of more than 20 national champions.

Relocating to Arizona in 1995, Pineda put in eight years as vice president and head instructor of America’s Best Karate, a system of five 7,000-square-foot schools, each serving 300 students. In 2004, he returned to Virginia to take up his current position as co-owner and head instructor of the Arlington school. A year later, he was also appointed head instructor of Jhoon Rhee International.





Fast Facts About Jhoon Rhee Tae Kwon Do Of Arlington

Name and location of your schools? Jhoon Rhee Tae Kwon Do, Arlington, VA

Number of years in business? 5

Number of schools you operate? 1, on two separate floors

Size of school in square footage? 3,200 (on Floor A) and 1,900 (Floor B), for a total of 5,100. Plans for expansion of an additional approximately 2,100 on Floor B, for a total of over 7,100 square feet.

Number of employees (both full-time and part-time)? 5 full-time: 2 owners and 3 employees, and 7 part-time employees.

Number of active students? Over 500 including students on "trial."

Are your children and adult classes separate or mixed? Separate

Name of your billing company? Credit-card monthly processing, of which we are in total control.

From which company do you purchase most of your pro-shop supplies? Century Martial Arts in Oklahoma.

How much do you charge for the first family member per month? After a \$295 registration fee, \$179 for KneeHigh Ninjas, \$189 for juniors/teens, and \$149 for adults.

Do you offer a family discount and, if so, how much? Yes, 10% for 2nd member, 25% for 3rd, and 50% for 4th and more.

Amount of yearly tuition? For Monthly/PIF, Ninja: \$2,443/\$2,223. Junior/Teen: \$2,415/\$2,343. Adult: \$1,935/1,863.

Monthly pro-shop gross? \$4,000. During "T Shirt Season" and the Holiday Season, between \$6-7,000. This is somewhat misleading since we give embroidered uniforms and hand pads as part of the registration.

Do you charge testing fees and, if so, how much? \$45 per belt

Do you have an after-school pick-up program? No

“Whole classes are not devoted to any one single element — sparring, say, or forms. We teach everything every day: forms, combinations and sparring. This increases quality, even if it’s more difficult. This means we work twice as hard since we don’t take any shortcuts.”

First of all, Pineda stipulates, credit is due the Jhoon Rhee system’s modernized taekwondo. “The Grandmaster has made his curriculum accessible to people of all ages. Easy, maybe, but accessible to all.”

Pineda and Shackelford retain the Jhoon Rhee schools’ basic division of students into three levels. The Arlington location offers, for four- to six-year-olds, its KneeHigh Ninjas Program; seven- to twelve-year-olds are enrolled in the Junior Program; and thirteen and up enter the Teen/Adult Program.

“Our most flexible schedule is for ages four to six,” Shackelford explains. “There are twenty-three classes, so parents have choices.”

“We teach traditionally,” says Pineda. “Whole classes are not devoted to any one single element — sparring, say, or forms. We teach everything every day: forms, combinations and sparring. This increases quality, even if it’s more

difficult. Making things easier tends to be a downfall for instructors, because this means we work twice as hard since we don’t take any shortcuts.”

Professionalism comes up again.

“Having been a pro, I know how instructors with a competition background can give students an outside perspective,” Pineda says. “Aside from media, kids don’t know what’s being done out there. Little schools can develop a locked-in culture, and their kids think they’re as good as can be. [What we offer] elevates kids’ sense of what’s out there. We know competition grades, so we push our students and train champions.”

Parental Involvement

What Shackelford and Pineda clearly excel at is involving the typically-exceptional Arlington parent. What well-to-do, well-educated parents look for are opportunities for their children, when outside the home, to



stay secure in an environment where they continue to experience the special values which produce high achievers. The Jhoon Rhee school has the cache of a famous lineage, and parents coming through the front door experience, in meticulous detail and with just the correct class-conscious accents, a martial arts outfit worthy of that lineage. That’s no small accomplishment.

Pineda gives an example. “To appreciate athletics, integrity and self-discipline is hard for six-year-olds. KneeHigh Ninjas takes a carrot-on-a-stick approach. The student earns a special blue stripe by bringing a note from home about how hard he’s trying to do his best at home. Then we build confidence by reading the family note out loud to the class. This allows the parents to take an active part in their training and show the importance of doing their best at home.”



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Shackelford adds, “Students get a holistic approach. What earns a black belt is also conduct at home. Character is as important as martial arts ability.”

Part of forming a good professional character is a willingness to help others. Here, charity work is part of character-building for kids.

“They may not have connections to a charity of their own. We make sure they give back to their own community. Adults also get to flex their moral muscle, and they want to help. They just need a place [to start].

“We’ve always done charitable work since we first opened. It’s more than just money. We’ve had mini-drives collecting door-to-door. Haiti relief, recently, was not cash donations, but based out of a local doctor’s clinic in Haiti. What was desperately needed were toiletries. We put together Care Kits and sent 1,500 to Haiti.”

Testing Kids – and Parents, Too!

It’s almost reassuring to hear that, like every other school, the Arlington space has its own retention problems.

The dropout rate is 20% from year to year. Shackelford’s analysis pinpoints “over-scheduled kids. We’re just too busy. It’s also the case that government folks come and go.”

Even so, the school recently expanded to a second floor. With the instructors’ hands-on commitment, it’s not surprising that their worst problem is “managing classes as we grow, to make sure we still give individual attention.”

Crunch time comes when handling promotions.





“We started with monthly exams,” Shackelford explains. “As enrollment grew, we took two nights. You don’t want to cancel classes: It’s poor service and makes other classes bulge. Now, it’s up to six tests a month. We call parents forward on the mat afterward to go into students’ testing grades.

“Testing is a lot of work, but a very important part of the personal touch. We test every kid. Each has his own grading sheet and we give feedback right away. We take the time to meet with the kids and their parents after the test. If we test twenty students, they each get a complete report card; and the parents get in line to receive the grades with them. When the child has passed, it’s not just that he passed but also how good he was.

“For kids that don’t pass, there are free private lessons, if needed for success. We won’t compromise this. And the following Friday, we have an award ceremony. We do a demo, tie on the new belt, sign the diploma and sit



down to a potluck dinner for thirty-five to forty-five attendees.

“All this gives value to the belt and the hard work put into earning it. They are told, ‘We won’t pass you just because we like you. Otherwise, that would be unfair to the hard work you’ve put in.’ They are rewarded, and it gives them a [good] feeling for what they have accomplished. We are not a black belt factory.”

This does more than say a job well done. It influences young minds with the mantra of positive American professionalism. That is, in life, only sustained hard effort achieves rewards.

Extending highly-successful traditional values from one generation to the next is not elitist. And proof of the warm democracy at the heart of the Arlington school is how it includes special-needs children among those who pass the tests.

The Art of No Art

Jhoon Rhee’s friend, Bruce Lee, bragged about “art which is no art,” a fluid, unhampered, ever-adapting

Adaptive Martial Arts

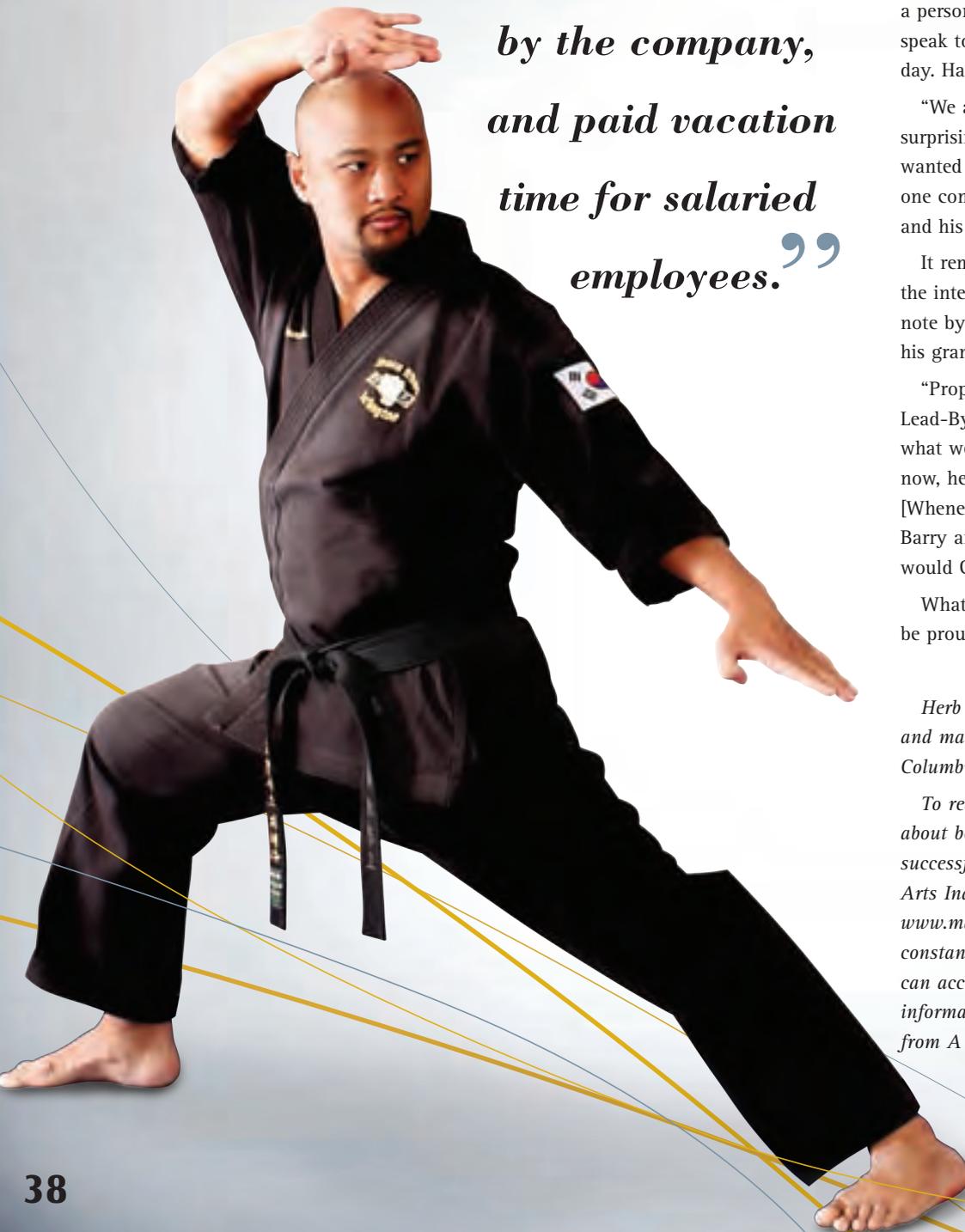
Instructor Anna Rome joined Shackelford and Pineda’s school in January 2008. With over 18 years of taekwondo experience, she is a certified 3rd-dan Jhoon Rhee instructor who has been teaching for a decade. Her martial expertise is as a weapons practitioner of the nunchaku, escrima stick fighting, the sickle-like kama and the bo staff, all of which she offers in the school’s Weapons Program.

Anna Rome also teaches a groundbreaking class in Adaptive Martial Arts. Her degree from George Mason University is in Integrative Studies with a concentration in Creative Arts and Therapy, which Shackelford describes as “designing programs and life skills for children with special needs. My psychology license,” he continues, “is now geared to this.”

The school website (www.ArlingtonKicks.com) gives a good idea of the Adapted classes: “Students receive individualized instruction while learning to excel in a group setting. These weekly half-hour classes will give students an excellent opportunity to improve their motor skills, coordination, focus and self-control through martial arts drills and games.”

“We also treat our employees in a professional manner. We provide excellent pay and benefits, like a retirement plan for which the company matches three percent, health/dental insurance with all premiums paid

by the company, and paid vacation time for salaried employees.”



self-defense not limited to any single fighting style. Is there a business arts' equivalent? Something of this ultra-expert fluidity shows up in the school's management style.

"Nobody here is just answering phones or signing contracts," Shackelford points out. "Our front desk is everybody. Deanna Goelzer Hawk, our office manager, is a second dan responsible for the office, yes, but she can also teach. She, Francis and I cover the office. Our instructors all know how to answer parents' questions. We rotate so nobody is stuck on the floor for four hours. We switch around, and this gives us a personal touch, too. Parents can call and speak to the owners or instructor on any day. Hand-holding helps a lot.

"We are not good salesmen," he adds, surprisingly. "The other day a student wanted to buy a t-shirt, but there's a new one coming soon, so I told him to wait; and his mom appreciated it."

It remained to Francis Pineda to end the interview on the perfect martial note by extending a graceful bow to his grandmaster.

"Props to Grandmaster Jhoon Rhee. Mr. Lead-By-Example set the foundation for what we do," Pineda says. "For thirty years now, he has been like a second father to us. [Whenever we're making decisions] both Barry and I always ask ourselves, 'What would Grandmaster Rhee think?'"

Whatever he thinks, he certainly must be proud.



Herb Borkland is a veteran black belt and martial arts writer who lives in Columbia, Maryland.

To read many more insider tips about becoming a better instructor and successful school owner, visit the Martial Arts Industry Association's website at www.masuccess.com. Through this constantly-enhanced website, members can access a massive amount of useful information on just about any topic from A to Z.