

Cottage Hills dojo/gym producing ninja warriors of all ages

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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COTTAGE HILLS – One Riverbend dojo and obstacle course arena is training people of all ages to be ninjas – honestly, real ninjas.

Part time Bethalto Police Officer Timothy Minnick opened Shinobi Fitness in Cottage Hills three years ago. At that time, Minnick was a full-time police sergeant on the force, and ran the gym part time. Since then, things have changed. Minnick, who has trained in martial arts for two decades, decided he would operate the gym as his full-time profession. He recently returned from studying abroad in Japan under Grandmaster Dr. Masaaki Hatsumi.

Minnick teaches the survival arts of Bujinkan and Budo Tai Jutsu, which are rooted in Japanese traditions more than 1,000 years old. Unlike most popular martial arts, however, Minnick said the Japanese arts he teaches, which were used by both ninjas and samurais alike in ancient Japan, do not have sparring or scoring. Instead, he said, the arts are used for survival.

“Our art is not a sport art,” he said. “It's not something you go to tournaments for or fighting for points. It's not something to use for MMA or get into the octagon with – it's a survival art.”

Some of the tenants of the training, which is based on a culmination of nine traditions or schools of fighting, are used in military forces. One of the developers of the current U.S. Marines physical combat training regimen is also highly skilled in the traditions of Bujinkan.

Bujinkan and Budo Tai Jutsu utilize techniques such as joint manipulation, grappling and some acrobatics to be able to create distance from an opponent and escape. Minnick said every technique used is for survival and escape.

Outside of martial arts training, Minnick also operates obstacle courses at the facility. Obstacle courses are designed for both young people and adults alike. Minnick said he is currently training with people in their 70s as well as kids.

Some of the kids training at Shinobi Fitness are applying for something called “Best Kids Obstacle Courses.” Minnick said the website is being developed by people behind *American Ninja Warrior*, a show in which extremely athletic individuals tackle a complicated obstacle course. This Best Kids Obstacle Course has contacted some of Minnick's students for additional videos of them doing feats of strength and agility, but Minnick is not sure what the future of that project may look like.

He did, however, compete on *American Ninja Warrior* in season six of the show. Minnick said he did not make it past the fourth obstacle, citing his fourth knee surgery occurred only two months before being on the show.

“When you get an opportunity like that, you can't say no,” Minnick said. “I now have steel in both knees, and I guess I was not fully recovered. I lost at a sprinting part, and my sprinting was not up to par after the surgery.”