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## Seven Students Earn Black Belt Honors

Submitted by Linda Sosa



Front row, L-R: Samantha DeVecchi, Bridget Bradford, Alex Mangus; Second row, L-R: Mr. James Howe, Conor Whatley, Alex Morsey, Rajeev Oak, Brendan Bashin-Sullivan, Robert Bradford, and Gerrardo Pacheco; Third row, L-R: Chris Uy, TJ Curry, and John Drath Photo submitted

She added, "It took a lot of time and focus, but it was totally worth it."

Drath was also proud of the current group of inductees because it was such a diverse group. "This was an ideal group where all the students were strong in different ways. One was a sparring enthusiast, another was a forms star. Alex Mangus was an "overall" example of quality, leading the group as he worked towards his second degree. One is growing right now and was challenged by the conditioning needed to succeed. Later he used his size to break two bricks at the age of 12. And the two girls, Bridget and Samantha, are the youngest black belts to come out of this studio."

Drath's teaching does not end with the black belt ceremony. "Hopefully, this preparation illuminates to the students how much more there is to do and how much more there is to learn in martial arts."

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Lamorinda Martial Arts Studio celebrated eight years in business by hosting its tri-annual black belt promotion test on Saturday, May 1st at the studio in Orinda.

Seven students, between the ages of 10-18 years old, tested for the coveted black belt and the degrees beyond. The four-hour test was overseen by martial arts fourth degree master, and studio owner, John Drath.

The chosen students were required to demonstrate excellence in skills ranging from basic self defense techniques, punching defenses, heavy bag kicking and punching techniques, traditional Korean poomse (choreographed formal forms), three rounds of sparring against current black belts, wood breaking with icks and hand strikes, and the grand finale was the breaking of bricks. The seven students, dressed in traditional white uniforms, were evaluated by seven judges.

Brendan Bashin-Sullivan, Alex Morsey, Alex Mangus, Conor Whatley, Rajeev Oak, Bridget Bradford, and Samantha DeVecchi were awarded for their years of dedication and hard work by earning the honor of black belt status.

Sitting with sweat still dripping from her forehead, DeVecchi explained her thoughts. "Since I was the youngest, it felt great to accomplish this goal because it made me feel like I was empowered."