

A Warrior's Spirit

By Dedra Cordle
Southwest Messenger - Staff Writer

Mary Thomas developed a level of dedication to karate well before she became a student of the sport.

At the age of 6, Thomas was watching a television program when it was interrupted by those dreaded commercials. As she sat through the seemingly endless break, there was one advertisement that caught her eye.



“It was one of those cheesy homemade commercials,” recalled her father Shawn with a slight shake of his head.

It had beats, action scenes and a slick catchphrase. It should not have been anymore more than an amusing 30-second promotion of a local martial arts training academy, but to Thomas it was a life-altering experience.

“I thought karate just had to be the coolest,” she said with a laugh.

In her daze, Thomas forgot the most important rule of commercial advertisements for products or businesses that you would like to know more about – to pay attention to the name or the number it provided.

“I spent the next month watching TV, waiting for it to come on again,” Thomas said.

Eventually, her dedication paid off and about a month later, she learned the phone number to the Midwest Martial Arts Academy.

“I thought ‘Well, I have to let her do this now’,” said Shawn.

Soon after, Thomas enrolled in her first karate class and discovered firsthand that it really was the coolest.

“I really enjoyed it,” she said.

As the years passed, Thomas became even more dedicated to the sport, but branched away from her first training academy so she could learn different martial arts styles.

In 2013, Thomas became a student at Warrior Spirit Karate in Grove City where she studied and excelled under the tutelage of Don Mathews, a locally renowned instructor and martial artist. It was at this facility where she discovered a desire to compete in karate tournaments.

“Mary has always been competitive at everything she does,” said Shawn. “From playing tiddlywinks when she was younger to point fighting now, she just is so competitive, which is why I think she took to tournaments right off the bat and in a big way.”

Since she started competing in karate tournaments in 2013, Thomas has wracked up a plethora of first place finishes at events all across the country. She even received a second and third place finish in weapons kata and kumite, respectively, at the USA National Karate Championship in Reno, Nev. last year.

Presently, Thomas is hard at work training for the upcoming national qualifying event in West Virginia later this month.

“I’ll be in here training every single day,” said the 15-year-old who has made it one of her goals to earn a spot on the U.S national team.

Mathews said with her drive, dedication, talent and spirit, she will make it far in the world of karate and beyond.

“As a student and a person, she is just fantastic,” he said. “I wish I had 100 more just like her.”