

are focused on the practical application, if not for self-defense in the street then at least for full-contact sparring and tournament bouts.

When I mention this to Odom – that Cook and I seem to be at opposite ends of the spectrum – he offers a characteristically positive observation: “In many respects it almost puts you at the same end of the spectrum. You’ve got a different approach to it – he’s got a physical approach, you’ve got a philosophical approach. But both of you are extremely interested in the warrior aspect of life.”

I appreciate the sentiment, but one thought lingers in my mind: *At the moment, Cook, the practical fighter, could kick my philosophical butt.*

**COOK STANDS** out in the class by virtue of his forays into competitive fighting. But he shares with every other student something far more important – an unconditional willingness to help fellow students. And camaraderie, I’ve come to realize, is yet another benefit of studying the martial arts – at least at Norfolk Karate Academy. At various moments over the last few months, I’ve received help and encouragement from high-ranking adult students, other beginners who have mastered techniques that I happened to have missed or forgotten, and even some of the kids.

There’s friendly competition, to be sure, especially in sparring, and some of the older teenagers and younger adults go at it pretty hard. But there’s always an atmosphere of mutual respect for fellow students. This is especially evident during tests for promotion to a new rank. Invariably, someone will make a mistake. Students who are watching simply sit quietly at such times – then applaud enthusiastically when the test taker eventually prevails.

Odom gave his biggest test in December – approximately 20 students were up for promotion – with Roberts and other grand masters (8<sup>th</sup> degree or higher) on hand as judges.

I was not among those being tested, but I watched with interest because I wanted to get a glimpse of the challenges that lay ahead.

The test for yellow belt is brief but not without difficulties. Candidates perform a series of kicks and punches, Kibon I and II, more kicks and punches on pads held by a partner, self-defense maneuvers in response to a series of mock attacks, and finally, the breaking of a single pine board with a front kick.

Candidates for higher ranks perform more forms, more advanced self-defense techniques, a round of actual free sparring, and the breaking of two or more boards.

For brown belts and black belts, the boards are replaced with concrete blocks.



## GEORGE MORITZ

**Age:** 67

**Rank:** Brown Belt

**Occupation:** Mechanical engineering consultant specializing in hyperbarics and diver life support

**City of residence:** Virginia Beach

### **Why did you decide to take up the martial arts and what are you getting out of it?**

I have always been interested in close combat. I wrestled in high school and at the Coast Guard Academy.

I started with Bill after my wife Susan met him when he was

making plans to open his school. She trusted him because he was a Ranger colonel. And since she knew I’d always wanted to do this kind of thing, she asked him if he had any qualms about teaching someone my age. Based on what she told me, I was there the day he opened with a check for 6 months of training.

My goals are: (1) controlling weight and body-fat percentage; (2) increasing flexibility, suppleness, and agility, and (3) regaining balance. So far, I am actually attaining these goals. I am now trying to improve my skills as I work toward black belt, and I have become very interested in the Gracie jujitsu.