KRAV MAGA
For Fitness And Self Defense

BY HEATHER LARSON

Born in a land where members of the military are frequently in one-on-one fighting situations, Krav Maga, pronounced "Krahv Magah," was developed for the Israeli Defense Forces. It means "contact combat" in Hebrew. Already popular with American law enforcement, Arizona centers for this defensive art are attracting a broad range of students. While some are there for the self-defense aspects, for others, it is a way to get fit.

Instructor Alan Dankwerth, 66, Oro Valley, said those interested in trying Krav Maga don't need prior physical training.

He explained, "It was designed for people of different degrees of physical fitness. I've had people come in who haven't even done a push-up for years. The first night they learn one defensive move and combatives. Just bring a desire to learn practical self-defense. And, it's not a good night if you don't break a sweat."

John Cook, 56, instructor of a Yuma Krav Maga center, described his students, "Professional people, a little older in their 40s and 50s that just want to learn self-defense and conditioning. I also see caseworkers for the housing authority that work in low-income communities. Krav Maga seems to attract the ones that are not quite aggressive. Those people are in there to learn something, to condition themselves and they're very level-headed."

Manuel Robinson, 33, and Josh Ackerman, 20, are head instructors at a Chandler center. They say the nature of the defensive method includes demanding drills.

Ackerman said, "Our drills build the mentality of somebody attacking you on the street. The drills are supposed to make you want to stop but you keep pushing through it. That's the whole mentality about Krav Maga; if you're attacked on the street, you don't stop attacking back."

Student Robyn Pappas, 47, Peoria, remembered how tough her first class was, "I almost died. I was out of breath but I pushed myself and I realized I can do more than I think I can do. All the instructors make you do more than you think you can do, and everybody's very supportive. I am out of shape and overweight and they were very accept-no-shame basis."

While a good workout is a bonus of Krav Maga, its creation was as a defensive program.

Jay Ackerman, 44, (father of Josh) said that Krav Maga is not a martial art, although it does have a belt system. Co-owner of Krav Maga centers in Phoenix and Chandler, he says instructors and students choose not to wear belts in class. Students call their instructors by their first names and don't wear special outfits, just regular workout clothes and sneakers.

Ackerman added, "It's a military combat system and a street survival self defense system. It takes all the elements that are simple to use, that fly out of you under stress and makes them available when you need to use them. There's nothing traditional about it. It's based on what's going on in this world today. So, what we train today could be changed tomorrow. It's not based on punching or kicking the air or using techniques that have absolutely nothing to do with attacks that are going to happen to you."

Jay's wife and partner in the business, Joy, 41, said that about 25 percent of the enrollment is involved in law enforcement. And, some students report that Krav Maga helps them to deal with potential occupational hazards.

One student who takes his Krav Maga skills to work every day is Sgt. Todd Goehring, 41, Scottsdale, who heads up the Phoenix Police Department Gang Unit. He said the techniques have prepared him for the kind of confrontations he can face.

He said, "We probably deal with the most violent members of society and this class helps you mentally and physically to prepare for that. These guys fight you because they need to prove to their buddies that they're the tough guy and they want to take on a cop. If you feel like you're prepared for that on the street, it shows, and these guys will back down."

Jay Ackerman and instructor Criss Moosman, 34, Glendale, have created REACT™ that gives students a chance to watch a videotape of themselves as they engage in "fights" with instructors suited up in protective gear.

Ackerman asserted, "You can train all these scenarios that we do in here, but until you're actually able to use the techniques, you don't know how you would react. So Moosman and I developed this REACT™, or Reality Environmental Adrenal Conditioning Training, that puts people in an environment in the exact scenarios we want to train with."

Moosman said he uses the REACT™ sessions to expose his students to the types of behaviors they can expect from attackers. This also involves what to say during the "interviewing process" criminals use to figure out if they have a viable victim.

He added, "The psychological profile of a criminal is very much overlooked. The majority of self-defense does not even address that. That's where you need to begin to diffuse the situation before it even starts."

Arizona Krav Maga Centers

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