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## The Serene Warrior

# Martial Arts Master Turns Out Local Heroes

BY CHANDRA NILES FOLSOM

Yellow, orange and red: the once calming hues of sunset are now the colors of anxiety, visual alarms that warn of the level of terrorism's threat to our nation. The days of innocence are gone, and nowhere is that more evident than among those working in the military, law enforcement and emergency services.

Calasanz, a martial arts master born in the Dominican Republic, has spent a lifetime as both a student and teacher of Karate, Kung Fu and Kickboxing. Today, he runs a top-rated dojo that is one of Norwalk's best kept secrets. His unique system, an integration of essential martial arts and a contemporary physical development program, has become a favorite among many security professionals living in the area.

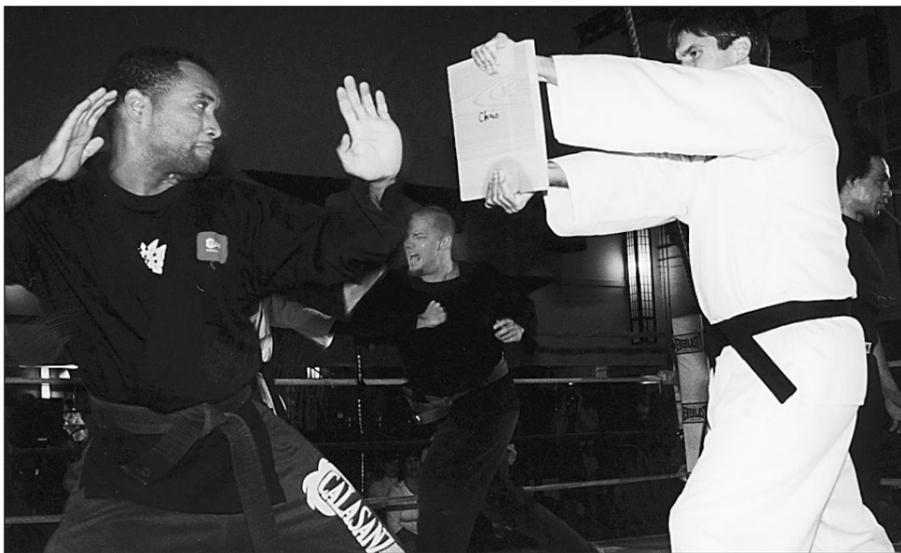
"During the 1980s, I began to make a name among law enforcement," said Calasanz. "Through the simplicity of my system, within two or three months, officers could learn the skills needed to give them an edge on the street."

What Calasanz refers to as the Way of the Serene Warrior is the approach he passes on to those entrusted with protecting the public. Interestingly, the system is not as much about subduing others as it is about mastering one's own self. According to Calasanz, once students of martial arts learn



Contributed photos

Martial Arts master Calasanz, above, a well-oiled machine, shows his students, above, at left and below, how it's done.



how to hold, rule and dominate their acquired skills, they will naturally develop a greater respect for others.

Tom, a local police officer, had been assigned to a really tough neighborhood. Although he was trained and armed, Tom never really felt secure on the streets until his brother brought him to the dojo.

"I taught him a combination of systems and in just one month he was able to relax," said Calasanz. "Tom kept on studying with me and later earned a black belt."

With its towering rafters, the back-lot dojo is a curious blend of chi and machismo. A regulation-size boxing ring is the centerpiece of the studio. On one side, martial artists grunt and shout as they attack sandbags and wooden dummies. Across the studio, others bend and stretch gracefully beside a ballet bar. In between, private workout sessions and group classes attract curious stares from bunnies, flying squirrels, turtles and lizards housed in camouflaged cages. Add to that, a wide-screen television set and the dim flicker of candlelight, and this juxtaposed set of opposites allows the cares of everyday life to fade away while body and mind are transformed.

"This is a very sophisticated method," said Renee, a black belt in Goju Ryu Karate and a certified personal trainer at the Norwalk dojo. "We don't teach brutality here. Our system is very simple and precise, and many people in the military and law enforcement find this more practical form of fighting to be the ideal total body workout."

While it may be true that the system can be learned in a relatively short period of time, the integration of body, mind and spirit does not happen overnight. Rather, it evolves from the discipline, focus and determination that come only from within. As students of martial arts develop, they learn more than just how to throw a punch or a kick—they learn a way of life. Still, every journey always begins with a single step.

"Black belt doesn't mean too much here," said Calasanz. "The reason is that, in just one, two or three months, I can make anyone a good self-defense fighter. Even after one hour of training, people see how it really works."

Spencer is a police officer who came to the dojo because, although he was skilled as a fighter and quite muscular, he was also very tight and inflexible. By incorporating

Wing-Chun, a more vigorous form of Tai Chi, into his workout, Spencer was soon able to develop the aerobic capacity, balance and grace needed to coordinate his skills and move beyond his "tough cop" persona.

"People who work in security need to be prepared for anything," said Calasanz.

"Once they become comfortable with footing and balance they can concentrate on what needs to be done without losing their cool. Learning exactly how to move and economizing those movements saves time and energy when lives are at stake."

John, a professional fighter, arrived at the dojo from one of the toughest karate schools in the country. He was looking for something extra to give him an edge and found it with the Calasanz system. Today, John works as a special agent with the government.

Before shipping out to the Middle East, Chris, a Marine, was sent to the dojo by

his father. There he learned a unique form of kickboxing and became one of the best.

"People in this line of work don't usually have the luxury of time," said Renee. "Our accelerated learning course doesn't take the place of professional training, but complements it. Confrontations on the street happen fast, and the ability to react quickly is key. Most of these guys would rather learn how to take someone down to the ground without having to use a weapon."

Calasanz also teaches a variety of courses for men, women and children, including a special course for the physically challenged. Calasanz Martial Arts is located at 507 Westport Ave. For more information, call 847-6528, or visit the Web site, [www.calasanz.com](http://www.calasanz.com).

*Editor's Note: The full names of Calasanz's students have been withheld due to the nature of their work.*

