



# MASTER KYLE PHILLIPS

## Changing Negative Energy to Positive

BY JENNA CAPUTO

PHOTOS BY TARA WILEY PHOTOGRAPHY

AND CONTRIBUTED BY THE PHILLIPS FAMILY

Originally from Buffalo, NY, Kyle Phillips is the son of a military family. His mom took a break from her service to raise him and his older brother and sister, but his father was stationed at the Schenectady armory and the family moved here, making the Capital District Kyle's home.

When Kyle was only four years old, they saw a commercial on TV for Taekwondo. Taekwondo, meaning “foot-hand-art,” is an official Olympic sport and the most widely practiced martial art in the world. His mom asked if he and his brother would like to take a class and they jumped at the chance. Kyle quickly took to it, and achieved his black belt by age 11 and started assisting with classes. This led to a passion for teaching. “Ever since then I knew I wanted to be a martial arts instructor teaching Taekwondo full time at my own school,” he says.

Along with Taekwondo, Kyle also enjoys music. Pursuing these two art forms always fills him with happiness. A natural leader, between the ages of 13-16 Kyle ran a community service based Taekwondo program called “Kick for Christ” through his family's church. The program was hugely successful, seeing the students grow through the belt ranks and competing in both regional and national tournaments.

He attended St. Lawrence University, receiving his Bachelors Degree in sociology and a minor in philosophy. While there, he participated in a school trip to Ethiopia, sponsored by the sociology department. For three weeks he studied the Rastafarian community located in Shashamane, a town outside the capital of Addis Ababa. “Seeing a different way of life in another part of the world gave me a greater appreciation for the opportunities afforded to me at home,” explained Kyle.

A multiple-time New York State and National Champion, Kyle has competed against the best in the USA and some of the best in the world. At the 2012 National Taekwondo Championships in Dallas, TX, he won all five fights, earning the gold medal and seeding him as the third best Welterweight in the USA at that time. The pieces were all coming together, and as a national team member, he had high hopes for the Olympics.

After his college graduation, he worked for Travelers Insurance to finance his dream of making it to the 2016 Olympic Games. Unfortunately, he fell short of this particular goal, but another lifetime goal was still within his reach – one day



opening his own Taekwondo studio. “Taekwondo has been a constant in my life throughout all other endeavors. Currently holding the rank of fifth degree (master), I look forward to, many years from now, earning the honors of the high dan (grandmaster),” he says. “I love Taekwondo because it gave me (and still gives me) an outlet for facilitating both positive and negative energies. We all experience life differently, and in my personal experience, my life’s made better due to my martial arts practice.”

After working at Travelers for five years, he finally was able to see his dream come true with the help of his wife and family, resigning to open his school full time. Nisky Martial Arts and Family Center, right here in Niskayuna, is a destination for students to not only practice the art of Taekwondo, but to also learn vitally important life skills. Students can start as early as age three, and there is no limit to the age range. After 30 years of practicing, Kyle is excited to be able to pass down his knowledge. “Working with our students, young and old, watching them grow is what I love most about what I do!” he exclaims. His passion has paid off and the school now has its first set of intermediate students that will begin sparring this quarter. In winter, the school has their end of the year talent show, and in summer they enjoy an annual picnic located in Blatnick Park. “I am blessed every day to be able to do what I do,” he says. “Teaching Taekwondo is a passion, and I’m thankful every day for it.”

Kyle is married to Devica Phillips, known as “Mrs. Dee” at the school, where she acts as the program director and facilitator of all new and existing memberships. Born in Suriname, South America, Devica moved to New York at seven years old and has been in the Capital Region since 2000. They have two children, Zara and Zak. Zara was born sleeping on October 10, 2017 and inspires them everyday to do their best and do all they can to raise awareness for stillbirths and other baby health complications. They are involved with the March of Dimes, volunteering whenever possible and participating in the annual walks with the goal of raising at least \$1000 from their family name every year. They also held a fundraiser for the Angel Names Association in Saratoga, raising close





to \$4000 for the group's funding for stillbirth research. Angel Names also has a walk every October.

"Stillbirth is still very taboo," says Kyle, "but people can help spread awareness by telling their stories even though this can be very hard. People can acknowledge that this happens by attending walks, candle lightings and even knitting hats to donate to local hospitals." Our local hospitals have support groups for families affected by stillbirth, and volunteering with the local groups can also be a source of comfort as well. The Phillips family hopes to start a new fundraising event of their own to honor Baby Zara each year and to help spread awareness to the community. In addition to their work with the stillbirth community, they also support Toys for Tots and are sponsors for Nisk-a-day.

When not at the studio practicing Taekwondo, Kyle enjoys practicing his music, learning phrases in new languages, and most recently, practicing Jui Jitsu. He enjoys all languages, but if he had to choose a favorite, he would pick Spanish. After his cousin once gave him a 45-minute crash course on the tabla (an Indian classical drum), he fell in love and hasn't stopped playing since. He volunteers at a couple local Mandir (Hindu temple) where he plays this drum for their Sunday morning services.

But his greatest love is spending quality time with his family. "We love each other more each day and attempt to mindfully count our blessings in order to take nothing for granted," he states. "We also make it a point to be ambassadors for the community in order to make it a better place." They love traveling to cultured and exciting places seeking out delicious local foods and hope to visit Europe in the near future. When at home, Kyle loves going for hikes and playing soccer at the parks, and now that Zak is one, he is looking forward to playing soccer with his son soon, too.

"We're a family that loves what we do and are dedicated to making our martial arts and family center a place of growth and development for

students of all ages," says Kyle. If you are thinking of trying a martial art, it's never too late. "The time is now!" Kyle advises. "If you have a place or style of interest, I encourage you to try a class, meet the instructor and staff to determine if it's right for you. Have long-term thinking toward your practice; dedicate at least a year because it's about growth, both physical and mental, and this doesn't happen overnight. Our hope is that we are making a positive, long-lasting impact on the community and wish to continue doing this for many, many years to come."

Kyle's life mantra not only fits with his chosen profession, but are important words for all of us to remember as we strive to create positive energy in our lives every day – "Every day, little by little, better and better." ■

*For more information about the Nisky Martial Arts and Family Center, visit [niskymartialarts.com](http://niskymartialarts.com).*

