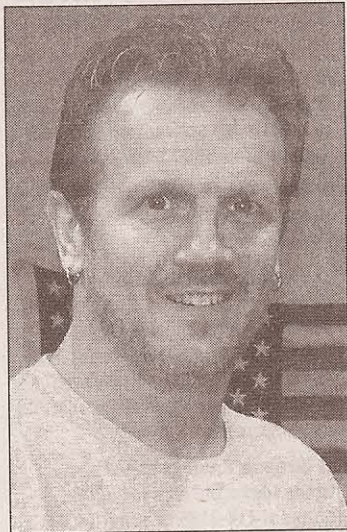


KICKBOXING

Local tapped to lead new Arnold Sports Festival event



JOHN STREIT

Virginia Beach kickboxing instructor/promoter Craig Smith was selected to run the kickboxing portion of the 20th annual Arnold Sports Festival.

By John Streit
Correspondent

Vying with the holidays, Virginia Beach's Craig Smith had to dig deep in December to draw national attention to the kickboxing events he promotes.

But now – with a little help from Arnold Schwarzenegger – his latest venture more than sells itself.

Selected by American martial arts legend Tokey Hill, Smith will organize, promote and run the inaugural kickboxing event of the 20th annual Arnold Sports Festival in Columbus, Ohio.

“There’s not a bigger name in fitness than Arnold Schwarzenegger,” Smith said. “Now, all I have to do is call people and say, ‘I’m in charge of The Arnold. Can you come help?’

And they’re like, ‘The Arnold Classic – I’ll be there.’ His name carries that power.”

The fest, to be held Feb. 29 to March 2, draws more than 150,000 spectators to witness 1,700 athletes competing in 36 sporting events from fencing to cheerleading to bodybuilding.

Until this year, kickboxing wasn’t part of the martial arts portion of the classic. But in the spirit of the ever-expanding event, martial arts director Hill added the sport to the lineup.

He looked no further than Smith, 45, to take the reins.

The 20-year kickboxing veteran, who owns the Craig Smith Kickboxing gym and training facility in Oceana, has promoted national events across the region for years, most recently the World Karate Kickboxing Organization

U.S. National Championships in Chesapeake in November.

“Just to receive an e-mail from Tokey Hill was something that really lifted my spirits,” Smith said.

Although the event is in its first year, Smith expects to draw martial artists from several of the other disciplines. He anticipates at least 200 competitors.

Smith’s promotion of the event also afforded him the opportunity to field several of his pupils in the classic. They include: Michael Davenport, a 2007 Kellam High graduate; Jessica Goldyn, who is 9; George Mason University student Amanda Shiner; and Nelson Lebron, who is in Navy Special Forces and serving in Iraq.

“This will be the best moment in kickboxing since I

started,” said Davenport, who won a WKKO national championship for his age/weight class in November (9-2). “A whole lot more people – more than just the national level – will know about this one.”

Jessica said she’s anticipating stepping onto the biggest stage of her young martial arts career.

“I’m very proud of myself,” said the Corporate Landing Elementary student and WKKO national champion.

Smith added that promoting the event should give both his future ventures and the Beach martial arts scene more national visibility.

Information: www.arnoldmartialarts.com

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