

Karate champ's comeback a success

Lower Burrell resident Nancy Caliguri captured a first-place finish in her first match back.

BY DAVE YOHE

FOR THE VALLEY NEWS DISPATCH

Nancy Caliguri calls it retirement. But an 18-year absence from competitive martial arts was more like an extended break for the Lower Burrell resident.

Caliguri returned to competition recently for the first time since 1990 and didn't miss a beat. She won a Professional Karate Commission national title in women's black belt kata and is now ranked nationally.

"I came out (of retirement) because I felt good," Caliguri said. "I wanted to continue what I had started."

Caliguri, 53, initially retired after a shoulder injury forced her out of competition.

"I wasn't ready to retire (at that point)," Caliguri said.

In her first competition of the year, she set out to see how well she could do. She ended up finishing in first place.

That was when she decided to continue competing.

She also earned the No. 8 ranking by the United States Karate Alliance for 2008. It is the first time she has been in the Top 10 since 1989.

"(Kata) was developed years ago as a way to practice karate fighting," Caliguri said. "It's a set pattern of movements.



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Nancy Caliguri took 18 years off from competitive martial arts, but she won in her first event back.

It's a series of blocks, strikes and kicks."

Five judges submit scores, with the highest and lowest scores thrown out.

She has competed throughout the year in tournaments around the country, mostly in Pennsylvania, Ohio, New York, Illinois and Indiana.

"I felt really good physically. I wanted to see how good I actually felt," Caliguri said. "I wasn't nervous. I just went out and did my best."

In addition to winning the national title, she was awarded the 2008 Competitor of the Year by the International

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NANCY CALIGURI

LOWER BURRELL RESIDENT, ON RETURNING TO COMPETITIVE MARTIAL ARTS

Karate Kobodu Federation.

"I was in a motorcycle accident in 2000. I had to go through therapy," Caliguri said. "I think it was because of that and my comeback that I got the award."

With her performance, both the USKA and the IKKF have promoted Caliguri to the level of seventh-degree black belt.

"Karate is never-ending," Caliguri said. "To be promoted, it was an honor. I was very happy that I passed the test. There are very few many women at that level. There were hardly any women in karate when I started in 1975."

Her year is not over, though. She will be competing in the Lake Erie Martial Arts Open on Sept. 27.

As for how long she plans to continue, Caliguri said, "As long as my body holds up. I've been OK. I know what I need to do."

Caliguri, a real estate agent with Century 21, continues to teach at the Academy of Martial Arts in Lower Burrell with her husband, Frank.

"I tell her to go for it," Frank said.