THE ART OF RESPONSIBILITY
Students learn from karate instructor

BY DEBBIE HIGHTOWER

TRINITY — In addition to reading, writing and arithmetic, some Braxton Craven students are learning martial arts.

On a recent afternoon 12 boys donned their belts and took their positions on the gym floor. Nearby, Dara Matthews of Communities in Schools Randolph County watched intently. As part of a Communities in Schools initiative, CIS partners with Macon’s Martial Arts for SMARTS, which stands for students building character through martial arts.

As they began the afternoon session, students shared a bow with Grand Master Hughla McDowell.

“There are reasons why we have to demonstrate respect,” he said. “When you give respect you start gaining the respect of others. It’s treating people the way you would want to be treated. People who respect you will listen to you. You can start by paying attention to your teachers and listening to your parents.”

With 39 years of experience in martial arts, the master (McDowell) has returned to inspire another generation of apprentices.

“Karate is wonderful,” McDowell told his students. “In the past 38 years I’ve almost been involved in two fights, but I still respect and discipline every day.”

Following a demonstration by McDowell, students paired up to practice how to deal with the advance of an attacker.

KARATE
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“We are getting away from the attack, not initiating the attack,” explained McDowell. “If you’ve got somebody bigger than you, rotate your hips and then step back.”

The SMARTS program includes tangible evidence of each lesson learned. At the conclusion of the lesson, McDowell applied a new stripe of color to each student’s belt.

“I have found, in over 30 years of training black belt leaders, that a martial arts class gives an instructor the opportunity to teach life skills,” he said. “While the students are able to move around and practice their martial arts, they are more receptive to learning about courteous, loyalty, respect, self-confidence, perseverance, honor and a great attitude toward responsibilities and goals. Besides the character traits, research shows that martial arts, like exercise of any type, has the potential to reduce stress and improve overall attitude.

SMARTS participant Daniel jumped at the chance to enroll in the program.

“I look (Karate) a few years ago at Creekside,” he said, “I thought it would be fun.”

The mission of CIS is to surround students with a community of support, empowering them to stay in school and achieve in life.

For more information visit http://randolph.communitiesinschools.org.

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Lessons taught during the SMARTS program focus on how to turn away an attacker.

Before implementing the self-defense move for the day, students in the SMARTS program demonstrate mutual respect with a handshake.

This is the sixth year Communities in Schools has sponsored the SMARTS program. These students practice some self-defense moves during the class.