

ages and also has more generalized circus-skills classes for children on Wednesdays and Saturdays. In addition, the school offers summer camps.

“They learn coordination and body awareness, gross- and fine-motor skills,” says Gaudreau, who is also a nurse at Children’s Hospital & Research Center Oakland. “It happens in spite of itself. You’re having so much fun that you don’t realize the benefits.”

Gaudreau says some of the students have come to the circus school after leaving gymnastics because they have found it too competitive or time-consuming.

While most students are there just for fun, the school also has a performing troupe of young aerialists and has trained performers for Cirque du Soleil, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus and other performance venues.

“It’s about ordinary people doing extraordinary things,” Gaudreau says. “People don’t imagine this is something they can learn to do.”

Trapeze Arts. 1822 Ninth St., Oakland. 510-419-0700. trapezearts.com.

Karate Kids

Brannon Beliso, owner of One Martial Arts in San Francisco, has been practicing karate for 42 years, since he was 5 years old.

So it might be surprising that the eighth-degree black belt and son of a karate teacher thinks it’s just as important to



SAFARI RUN

Physical fitness is disguised as fun at San Mateo’s Safari Run.

teach children *not* to hit as it is to teach them to punch.

“I teach everybody that the best fight is the one you never got into,” says Beliso, whose own children are ages 1 and 31.

For Beliso, martial arts is about physical fitness but just as much about focus, control, discipline and the mind-body relationship, skills he says can be taught to children as young as preschool.

His classes, which were voted “best enrichment program” in San Francisco by *Bay Area Parent* readers this year, are equal parts karate and life-skills instruction, from stranger awareness to dealing with bullies. Children earn merit badges, and parents get take-home handouts on topics from focus to teamwork.

In addition, One Martial Arts hosts a summer day camp, which also was recognized by *Bay Area Parent* readers.

Beliso says any child can do martial arts, and he has often seen wallflowers blossom into confident kids.

“The spazzy kid just lacks focus,” he says. “Martial arts is so empowering.”

But Beliso also warns that not all martial arts programs, which are unregulated, have the same focus. He urges parents to visit classes and do their homework.

Beliso’s school has 600 active members, 400 of whom are children.

“Discipline in Western culture means punishment. In Eastern culture, it’s a way of life,” Beliso says. “Someone with great focus has an opportunity for an amazing life.”

One Martial Arts. 850 Taraval St., San Francisco. 415-731-9988. onemartialarts.com.



JESSE DRURY

Students at San Francisco’s One Martial Arts get a good dose of life-skills instruction with their karate lessons.