

'Most good fighters are really caring people. They can empathize with pain or adversity. A lot of times you'll find some of the best fighters are physical therapists, caretakers, artists, gardeners, things like that.'

— MIKE WALRATH

sen fighting as a hobby for her son, she respects his choice. She also says it's natural for him to have found a career caring for others. Aquino's expertise in caring for those in need stems from his relationship with his younger brother Eddie, who suffers from cerebral palsy. "He was always very close to that brother when they were younger," Guinn says. "[Caretaking] wasn't a big leap for him. It was something that he grew up with."

At Alvord-Taylor Inc., Aquino helps care for developmentally disabled people by cooking, giving showers and taking them to doctors' appointments and on excursions into the community. His supervisor, Molly Thompson, says he's an exemplary caretaker. "He's probably my best one," she said. "His personality, the way he handles people — he's just an overall good guy."

"It's more mentally rewarding because they have less than us," Aquino says. "I figure it's the same thing: They can't help it. My brother can't help it. They were born with this life so I do what I can to help out. It really does feel good to help somebody out who can't help themselves."

During the holidays last year, Aquino picked up shifts so others could spend Christmas and New Year's Eve with their families. He worked 16-hour shifts both days to ensure that someone was at the home, not just because an employee must always be there, but because the clients wanted to celebrate, too. Aquino's children were with their mother, so he picked up the hours. "People were quitting and there were shifts that needed to be filled," he said. "Nobody wanted to pick up the shifts, so I wanted to help out."

The foundations of nearly every form of martial arts training are self-control and discipline. Martial arts is a physical and mental challenge with oneself that builds confidence, according to Eugene Thai Boxing Head Instructor Mike Walrath.

"The guys who really work hard don't have the screwed-up ego and stuff," says Walrath, who trained Aquino for 10 years. "They don't have to prove themselves. They do it in the ring. When you see someone's development, it overflows into every other aspect of their life. It creates a really awesome citizen."

Aquino agrees. "The people who are teaching it are absolutely teaching the old ways," Aquino says. "It's like, 'Don't fight unless you absolutely need to.' Kids that I know who do this stuff are really level-headed. They don't go out starting fights."

Walrath, having known Aquino since he first started martial arts training, says that it's no surprise that Aquino



works as a caretaker and that it's common for martial artists to have peaceful professions and hobbies. "It goes hand in hand," he said. "Most good fighters are really caring people. They can empathize with pain or adversity. A lot of times you'll find some of the best fighters are physical therapists, caretakers, artists, gardeners, things like that."

Walrath also says when cage fighting pits non-athletic,

untrained fighters against one another it's hardly a form of martial arts. "I think it's the only sport an obese man can do," he said. "My opinion is half them guys are bums. The guys that have training sometimes draw a guy that can fight and sometimes they draw a bum."

Jason Georgianna, promoter for the Pacific Coast Cage Fights in which Aquino will participate in Eugene April 8, is trying to change the perception of amateur cage fighting as a vicious sideshow. Georgianna, who was formerly a partner in Brass Knuckles Promotions, which organized the January event, said that his new endeavor is to organize fight cards that match better qualified fighters so the event is less of a spectacle and more of a skill demonstration.

"I want it to be an athletic event where almost exclusively skilled amateur competitors come," he said. "I'd rather have fewer fights and have those fights be at a higher skill level."

This philosophy, in turn, will separate his productions from others that stage inexperienced fighters who quickly tire and produce more of a barroom brawl scene than a disciplined fight. He doesn't want to produce the circus act that Walrath so deeply dislikes.

"My vision is to keep increasing the quality level and skill level," Georgianna said. "Even though this is an amateur competition, I want the public to understand that mixed martial arts is an extremely technical and demanding sport."

For Aquino, martial arts has never been and never will be an expression of hatred or violence. He's a young man who was forced to grow up fast. But Aquino never shied from the ever imposing challenge of self-sacrifice. And today, while meeting the needs of his own children, his girlfriend and her two young kids, the clients he cares for and his growing number of nieces and nephews, Aquino puts his own desires last.

If it means working out without weights, sparring with a punching bag and learning technique from fights on TV, then so be it. "Life sure does change," he said. "All I can do is keep on going and take what it gives me. I'll tell you what, I like fighting in the ring better than I do fighting life because I can see who's coming at me in the ring. In life, you get hit, knocked down and you go, 'What the hell just hit me? Ah man, OK, I gotta get back up.'" ★



SATURDAY NIGHT'S FIGHTS

What: Pacific Coast Cage Fights — 12 mixed martial arts bouts scheduled, including welterweight title bout.

When: 7 pm, Saturday, April 8. • **Where:** Sheldon High School.

Price: \$30-\$65, \$20 for bleachers. Tickets are available at Safeway, the Hult Center box office, UO EMU, ticketswest.com or (800) 992-8499. More information is available at www.pcccagefights.com



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