

In the Communities

Tae Kwon Do in Old Crow

By Sandra Cairns, Coordinator Instructor
Alice Frost Campus — Old Crow

“What does the word INTEGRITY mean?”
“Never break a promise!” replies a chorus of Old Crow Tae Kwon Do students.

“These kids are isolated and physically tough,” says their instructor, Derrick Kapuschak, a Vuntut Gwitch’in First Nation citizen. “My overall plan is to create Black Belts that are a tradition in Old Crow. There is no other sport with a complete team in the community. As soon as these students get into competition, this will be huge.”

Self-esteem, fitness, self-discipline, self-defense and teamwork are key in this martial art. Derrick holds a 3rd Dan Black Belt; he is a member of Kee’s Tae Kwon Do Studio in Vancouver. His teacher, Grandmaster Ha, is the coach of the Canadian Olympic Tae Kwon Do Team. Derrick has returned to his community with a vision of developing a studio. This multi-partnered pilot project has been possible through Yukon College.

In this isolated community, Derrick takes every opportunity to teach his students valuable

skills. Today, there are four girls and three boys in class. In the warm-up exercises, Derrick includes crime prevention and fire safety.

Between watching the jumping-turning kicks and various punches, he reminds the students, “Do we show off to people in the playground?” “No Sir!”

After self-defense move #4, he asks, “What three things do we have to focus?” “Eyes, mind and body!” “What does this teach us?” “Discipline!” The students have homework sheets focusing on values and Canadian place names. The place names will eventually be code words for moves in competition.

Derrick’s vision is long term: “In a year I will take the best students with the best attitude and slowly turn them into instructors. They will have to write up their own class schedules, warm-ups, and see what’s in their minds.”

Derrick would like to develop a team for competition. When his current students reach high school and move to Whitehorse, Derrick is willing to follow them. If they travel beyond Whitehorse, they can continue the same curriculum at Kee’s Studios in Edmonton,



Derrick Kapuschak demonstrating kick to Donovan Frost and Jamie Tetlich. Photo by Mariko Nishikawa

Humour is a survival skill

By Sandra Cairns, Coordinator Instructor
Alice Frost Campus — Old Crow

“It helps when you talk to yourself!”
“Get mad at yourself!”
“Praise yourself!”

Students in a traditional sewing class at the Alice Frost Community Campus are teasing a fellow student as she wrestles with a bobbin.

“At any given time we may have to depend on our traditional sewing to survive in any part of the world,” says instructor Maureen Vittrekwa. “Being Gwich’in I learnt to sew when I was very

young. It was a ‘must’ to learn those skills.”

Maureen wants to make sure the old designs and materials aren’t lost. She talks about beadwork design. “It’s based on our wildflowers, and some of the designs are tracks, moose, ptarmigan and different kinds of leaves of medicinal plants. I do a lot of healing and praying and giving thanks when I sew.”

The course was made possible through the combined partnering of the Old Crow Campus Committee, Vuntut Gwitch’in First Nation, and the Aboriginal Healing Fund.

A woman arrives late. Someone looks up from her work. “Ten points off! Stand in the corner!”

Good-natured banter and country music fill the room as students work on canvas and rickrack gun cases, backpacks for potlatch plates and infant wrap-around moccasins. One woman is sewing skidoo mitts for her son. He needs them to travel to Crow Flats at — 40 below.

Two women are standing in a doorway working together to braid mitt strings. Many feet in length, they hang from the doorframe.

Everything created here will be put to use as soon as it is completed; traditional accessories are tailor made for the cold and blizzards of Old Crow.

While the sewing machines whirr, someone calls out, “Maureen, my thread’s jumping all over.” Another student is peering uncertainly at her rickrack. But even Maureen can’t assist her. “I borrowed someone else’s glasses and I can’t see. Someone ran over my brand new glasses with a grader!” Humour and fellowship are also vital survival skills being shared.

Antler Carving

By Sandra Cairns, Coordinator Instructor
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“A lady took a caribou antler and made a beach scene with palm trees. You wish! You wish a lot in Old Crow!” Martina Carroll describes the antler carving course she took last fall. “I did a landscape, mountains in the background, trees and “Teet’it Gwich’in” — that’s who I am — right in the middle. Some students would look at an antler and think about it — I could already tell what design I’d do.”

Students worked with moose and caribou antlers they brought from home or had donated to the course. With drommel tools, they turned antlers into geese in flight, poinsettias and jewelry pieces. Martina used the antler surface as a background for her etched picture.

“Shane was a really good instructor. He took his time to show us how to make it look professional.” Shane Wilson is a professional artist specializing in antler carving. His

international shows and years of experience translate into technique Martina can only describe as “WOW.” His website is a favourite of the Old Crow students who worked with him during his several months in this community.

Martina wasn’t surprised at the technical side of the work. “I grew up in Inuvik and I watched the Great Northern Arts Festival, so I’ve seen people carve. Some people do it the long way with hand tools. I was happy to do it the short way. We had to wear a mask to protect against antler dust. Also eye protection, ear protection and mesh gloves because the tools are high speed and dangerous.”

Martina bought a set of tools during the course and wants to continue carving. She wishes she could find some shop space. She has been re-thinking some designs. “I have designs in my head that are more youth oriented, modern. Like barbed wire. I’d like to try that on antler!”



Tracy Kapuschak created a detailed poinsettia in antler. Photo by Shane Wilson

WINTER INTEREST CLASSES AT THE ALICE FROST CAMPUS

In addition to credit college courses, the Old Crow Campus offered the following courses at the community’s request:

- > Antler Carving
- > Knife Making
- > Tae Kwon Do
- > Traditional Sewing
- > Toboggan making
- > Tae Kwon Do
- > Massage Therapy — an Introduction