

UNION TAE KWON DO

20 Year Anniversary

In late September we had the opportunity to sit down with Mr. or Master Faleski as he is known by his students and families, owner of Union Tae Kwon Do, to discuss his 20-year history in South Riding. Mr. Faleski took a chance on South Riding in 1999. He left his job in New York State and took over a space in South Riding at Peacock Market Plaza in South Riding Town Center. He saw the potential in South Riding and committed to build the business in our community. At the time, another couple partnered with the Faleski Family. The wives kept their jobs and the husbands began to build up the school. For over 2 years Mr. Faleski commuted from Burke to South Riding working long days and then doing the accounting many times until midnight, before facing the commute again to open the doors by 10 AM during the school year and 7 AM in the summer.

In 2001, Mr. Faleski was able to move to South Riding and have his wife and daughter join him here from New York State. Ultimately the other family moved away and the Faleski Family bought them out. They have kept in touch all these years sharing memories of the early years.

In 2018 Mrs. Faleski succumbed to cancer. She had entered her 9th year of battle. The outpouring of love and respect for her by the students, families, friends and the greater community remains a source of comfort for the family. Mr. Faleski is thankful for the school's first-rate staff for going above and beyond during this time of grief and always. He is eternally grateful to his daughter, Master Lewicki, son-in-law and granddaughter for stepping up to help him through this while dealing with their own sorrow. His greatest source of peace is steadfast dedication to family and his students. His greatest source of gratitude is watching them thrive in life.

Mr. Faleski has been the longest tenured sponsor of South Riding Events. He has immense pride in his students and the entire South Riding Community. His core values of traditional martial arts; it's etiquette and protocols as well as focus on academic excellence make his program stand out above many others. When you speak with him you know he really cares about his students and wants them to be their absolute best. Mr. Faleski would like to express his gratitude to Mr. Eric Spencer who for over 14 years has volunteered at countless community and in-house events on behalf of UTKD. Commitment from volunteers and values like Mr. Faleski's contribute to our fulfilling the vision of South Riding to be the best place to live and raise a family in Northern Virginia. He has links to hundreds if not thousands of our South Riding children and their families. We were able to find several of his students and families happy to share the impact of Mr. Faleski and the Union Tae Kwon Do program on their lives.



"Union Tae-Kwon-Do's martial arts training/ education is unparalleled in its ability to produce some of the most skilled and accomplished students I have ever had the privilege to train with. However, the school's most valuable attribute lies in the impact it has on its students' lives. Whether it is instilling self-control and discipline from an early age, making sure we all succeed academically, or pushing us to achieve excellence in other important activities, UTKD has played a defining role in who I am today. It is an honor to go out into the medical world knowing that I am a product of such an esteemed institution and that the connections I have made there will last a lifetime—one such friend happens to be a fellow black belt that I grew up with in UTKD after school and summer camp and is now my mentor in medical school. I consider Union Tae Kwon Do my home away from home and make it a point to visit as often as I can to give back to the school and share my experiences with the next generation of students."

- Akshay M.



"When I started at Union Tae Kwon Do nearly 16 years ago, I never could have imagined the impact it would have on my life. To me, Union is much more than just a Tae Kwon Do school; it is where I grew up and developed into the woman that I am today. As a student, I learned how to push through boundaries, be resilient in the face of disappointment, and to never give up no matter the obstacles in my path. As a volunteer, I learned the importance of giving back and just how much small moments can impact those around you. As a worker, I learned how to be confident in myself, how to use creativity to work through problems, and how to work with others. In Union, I found a second home and to this day Mr. Faleski's unwavering support is something I can always count on. Although I have long since moved away and on to college then medical school, he continues to mentor me and encourage me to reach for my dreams. While I would like to think I am special, I know that my experience is not a unique one. The dedication of the staff and instructors at Union to provide not only a space for their students to learn Tae Kwon Do, but also to learn the more important things in life and to grow into the future leaders of tomorrow. It is unparalleled. Although I may never again get to take classes regularly as a student at Union, I know that it will always be a part of my life and that it has shaped who I am today. While I know I will never be able to repay the gift that has been given to me, in the years to come, I hope I can continue to volunteer and give back in some small way to this place I call home."

- Rachel S.



Dear Mr. Faleski,
 Congratulations on your 20th Anniversary serving our community. Thank you for allowing my family to become a part of your family. From our very first class in 2000, we were impressed with your commitment to the students, teaching them to stay focused on schoolwork, respect for their elders, the rules and themselves - not to mention discipline in learning the art of Tae Kwon Do.

In every case, you and your family have lead by example. Standard practice includes at a minimum hosting drives for those less fortunate, originating a local Toastmasters program for students, supporting students and their families in difficult times and being actively involved in the community and the school and government levels.

I can't properly list all the accolades due you for there are too many - that is more properly attested to by the constant long list of former students returning just to say hi or participate in a "Paddle Ball Tournament" or more likely to thank you for the recommendation letters you have written personally, am proud to remain a student at Union and my family and I are honored to be a part of the Union family.

To continued success, my friend.

Respectfully,
 Thomas M.



"When I first walked into Union Tae Kwon Do in September 2002, I was six years old. I thought we were just going out to buy groceries—but within ten minutes, I was getting sized for a uniform, oblivious to the fact that I was beginning a journey that would span nearly two decades. For six years, I attended summer camp and after-school at Union. For another six, I herded elementary schoolers as an

instructor. And all throughout, I took classes six days a week and traveled coast-to-coast with Mr. Faleski, competing in national competitions. During those years, I spent more waking hours on that mat than I did at my own home. Union became a second family.

Over time, plenty of things have changed, but the Faleski family has always been a constant. They haven't just built one of the neighborhood's most prolific businesses, they've built an enduring community of students, parents, friends, and neighbors—one that grows together, celebrates together, and grieves together.

Yes, Union taught me how to keep a uniform clean and wrinkle-free—and how to split a cinderblock with my bare hand. But more importantly, it taught me to lead with patience; to accept victory (and defeat) with grace; and, after a multi-year campaign by Mr. Faleski, to stop using "like" as a filler word. The Faleskis challenged me when school didn't. They've indelibly shaped the person I am today, and I'm positive that hundreds of other students can say the same."

- Matthew R.



"Union Tae Kwon Do has provided a sense of community to my children. They will have lasting relationships with Mr. Faleski and Ms. Lewicki and a number of students of not only their age but students from kindergarten to high school who they have interacted with over the years. Junior Leadership Team program, demo performances and paddle ball competition have given them a sense being part of a community. The kids that have been part of the program have a great sense of responsibility, discipline and respect and these values are embodied and stressed by Mr. Faleski and the team. It definitely makes our lives as parents a little easier knowing that the kids are in an atmosphere where they are learning to be socially responsible and kind."

- Kaushik M.



"Words cannot express the gratitude and thanks that my family has for Union Tae Kwon Do's After-School Program. They have been a part of my family for the past 19 years. All my three kids had started at UTKD from kindergarten and since then have grown and matured into amazing and intelligent individuals. The solid core values foundation such as discipline, hard work, and respect, laid by them is what made and is making my kids into better, independent, and confident individuals. Thank you and wishing Union Tae Kwon Do a very Happy 20th Anniversary!"

- Utbala R.



Union Tae Kwon Do – Reflections

"What has Union Tae Kwon Do meant to our family? Looking back at the past 14+ years that our family has studied at Union Tae Kwon Do, we feel there is not any one word that describes the school's role in our life, but rather a multitude of words and feelings necessary. Among the most prominent of this multitude are family, friendship, and relationships.

We wanted a school that was going to teach our son respect, value of hard work, and integrity. What we received was much more. Our family has made friends along the way that we are still very close to. We have watched our own son grow up under the tutelage

of Mr. Faleski and Union's instructors from a gregarious young kindergartner to an intelligent, respectful, and engaging young adult. Our family has always said he is the man he is today, not just by what we as parents taught him, but also by what Union instilled in him as well. When we had our daughter, it was not even a decision that when she was ready, she would also attend Union. We now watch our young daughter traverse a similar path, albeit with her own flare and style. What we love the best is that the values and lessons instilled in students are everlasting and are the foundation of responsible citizenship.

Union has grown in our lives from martial arts school to integral part of our family. We say family, because that is what Union is to our family. Without the relationships with the School, Faleskis, Union Staff, and other families, as well as the friendships developed over time and common experience, South Riding, for my family would not be the same. They all have vested interest in seeing each child succeed, at their own rate. Never rushing or comparing one child to another. The Union Tae Kwon Do family welcomes, respects, and supports you and works with children as individuals, knowing that each child is different."

- Eric & Vikki S.





"The first time I walked through the doors of Union Tae Kwon Do at age 6, it took only a moment for me to realize that this place was special. The camaraderie between students, genuineness of instructors, and welcoming environment was unlike anything else I'd ever witnessed. Ever since, UTKD has embodied more than just another after-school program or martial arts school. To me, it is the epitome of a second family and home that has constantly supported me over the past thirteen years. Growing up, I was fortunate to be surrounded by instructors, including Mr. Faleski, who emphasized the importance of qualities such as honesty, discipline, and respect in day-to-day actions. As such, UTKD has instilled in me a set of core values, both academic and personal, that are a major part of my life today. Additionally, the UTKD family extends far beyond just Tae Kwon Do. The people I've met and instructors I've learned from have evolved into some of my closest friends and mentors today: relationships that I greatly cherish.

One of the defining features of the UTKD community is its drive to enrich students beyond solely martial arts training. For example, Mr. Faleski has been working with Toastmasters International to help students develop their communication skills; a mission that I have been heavily invested in. Five years ago, UTKD began working with Toastmasters International to host Youth Leadership Programs; public speaking programs during which students have the opportunity to practice, critique, and present speeches. Students who successfully completed the program can join the Union Gavel Club, a student-run club in which members receive feedback from peers and enhance their communication abilities. As a founding member and future President of the club, it was amazing to see such a platform where students could practice skills that directly impacted their futures. Endeavors such as these are just another example of the many ways in which UTKD prioritizes its students and truly has their best interests at heart. In the past 20 years, UTKD has touched the lives and hearts of the entire community and I cannot wait to see how it continues to do so!"

- Shreya K.



"People are defined by the experiences they encounter and the people they meet. I am lucky enough to have had been shaped by Union Taekwondo (UTKD) and the various people I crossed paths with over there. I started training when I was 5 years old. At that time (and until around high school), I was pretty shy and refused to talk to anyone at the school. The idea of being in front of an audience or leading something was very intimidating. Overtime, with the help of Mr. Faleski and Master Lewicki, I came out of my shell and can now comfortably lead classes, demos, and activities as a fourth degree black belt. I have grown and developed tremendously over the years, and still continue to do so.

I have also accumulated and learned a lot of life lessons from UTKD. Concepts such as humility, respect, discipline, and taking risks have stuck with me even when I'm in college. This has allowed me to gain opportunities and experience things that I maybe would have missed out on. Furthermore, UTKD has created an extremely supportive and positive community of students, families, and alumni. I know that I can always rely on the community for help and have already connected with some alumni for advice.

Overall, UTKD has been a positive, life-changing experience. I can fondly think back on various memories and friends that I have made over the past 13 years and look forward to making more."

- Rina S.



"My family has been members of Union TKD for 16 years. During that time, I've witnessed how the Faleski family continually gives, not just to the students in their school, but to the entire community. They run a traditional school with a focus on family and affordability. Their leadership programs evolve inwardly focused pre-teens into self-directed, confident young leaders focused on giving back to others. Personally, they went above and beyond helping my oldest by writing numerous recommendations for college, scholarships, and medical school. I'm convinced that she wouldn't be in her second year of medical school without their support and the values they helped instill. In addition, they were willing to take a chance on my middle daughter when no-one else would take her. Even though it took her much longer than average to get her black belt and she isn't the most diligent of students, they still value her for her strengths and nurture her. I enjoy going to class every week to continue to learn, improve, and stay fit. At almost 50 years old it can be humbling trying to keep up with the kids, yet I know that TaeKwonDo isn't a contest, but an individual journey completed in concert with others and in this case, friends."

- Dr. Robin Z.



"You do that at your Tae Kwon Do?!" "That's the response I get any time I talk about the unique activities I'm a part of at Union Tae Kwon Do. For as long as I can remember, UTKD has been such an influential learning space in my life. Of course, I adapted basic Tae Kwon Do skills such as self-defense, forms, and discipline, but what makes Union so different is their approach at targeting student needs in all criteria. The UTKD after school and summer camp programs encourage integrated learning in such an unusual environment, somehow managing to drive students towards developing deeper levels of thinking in all regards. I distinctly recall evenings in 1st

grade when I would come home with completed math worksheets and watch my parents' joy at the level of math I was pursuing at school. Imagine their shock when I told them that it was actually my Tae Kwon Do after-school instructor who gave me the math problems. Union's summer program used to be the highlight of my summer and I loved getting to explore topics ranging from music to aviation to spelling. As a summer camper, I especially loved doing different STEM camps, adding onto my growing passion for STEM which I continue to pursue by returning to volunteer and run those same camps for younger children. The stress on communication skills and public speaking makes students of Union so much better equipped to handle real life situations, putting them years ahead of their peers at any given time. As a member of the Union Toastmasters Gavel Club since the very beginning, I can honestly say that it has positively impacted my public speaking skills dramatically. Even in just day-to-day classes, students are encouraged to take opportunities ranging from leading stretching to helping class. UTKD has had such a massive impact on my life. It made me well-versed in daily life skills that I wouldn't have had exposure to otherwise. So yes, I learned "that" at my Tae Kwon Do, and so much more. Union Tae Kwon Do didn't just teach me how to be a black belt. It taught me to be a leader."

- Nina C.



"Our son, Alex, started at Union Tae Kwon Do at the age of 6 as a white belt and continued to train for the next 12 years, ultimately earning a 3rd degree black belt. UTKD has been an important part of his life and helped shape him into the young man he is today. He attended classes as well as participated in UTKD's after school program and summer camp. The structured after school program and summer camp provided fun times but also offered an amazing learning environment. He was challenged to be his best self everyday. He learned that earning the next level belt required hard work and discipline. Sadly, we departed UTKD in 2009 due to job transfers but we stayed in contact with UTKD knowing we would eventually return

to the area. During our time outside of NoVA, our son trained at two different tae kwon do studios and those studios were no comparison to UTKD. Upon returning to NoVA in 2015, one of the first things we did was re-enroll our son at UTKD. Due to the friendships he had made at UTKD years earlier, he was able to smoothly transition as if no time had passed.

UTKD is truly a one-of-a-kind family business. They genuinely care for the students, invest in them, and provide them amazing opportunities. Our son was a member of the Junior Leadership Team, an Assistant Instructor, and a member of the Demo Team which afforded him the opportunity to hone his leadership skills. He was also a member of the Gavel Club, a Junior Toastmasters group, which helped him improve his public speaking skills. UTKD is a second family to us. We are grateful for the opportunities UTKD has afforded our son over the years. He learned respect, discipline, commitment, leadership, and built lifelong friendships. Thank you, UTKD, for your positive influence on your students and the community. Alex's experiences at UTKD undoubtedly set him up for future success."

- Kara W.



"If you'd asked me six years ago to speak in front of a group, my heart rate would skyrocket, my knees would get shaky, my palms would start sweating. The agony of raising my voice to speak to my peers would have resulted

in a nervous panic and a flutter of excuses to get myself out of it. I was an average student in class, neither too loud nor too quiet, never a leader, mostly a follower. This all began to change with a simple request from Mr. Faleski. "Can you lead stretching?" I begged him not to make me, but of course he insisted and then walked into his office. I was a black belt, yet the idea of speaking to a class of 30 people terrified me. I slowly and begrudgingly walked in front of everyone and told them to hang down and touch their toes.

Obviously, Mr. Faleski knew what he was doing and continuously chose me to lead the Thursday classes, infamous for having the most people show up, and I slowly began to enjoy it. I added my own flair to each stretching routine, such as doing a backbend or finger stretches, highly meaningless but greatly entertaining. What was my worst nightmare became one of my favorite parts of class. Now, almost 20 years old, I was a summer camp counselor at a local STEM summer camp. My sole purpose was to lead children in various activities for eight hours every day. My soft voice, typically reserved for making bad jokes, became louder as I had to tell five-year-olds to stop screaming at each other. My voice projection and confidence grew through the years and I credit it to all the little experiences, such as leading stretching, and guidance given along the way, especially from Mr. Faleski. He knew that I had potential, I just had to be pushed in the right direction at the, unseemingly, wrong times and I thank him greatly for that."

- Aarti S.