

## Martial art students get kick out of award

MELVIN MASON [mmason@ctpost.com](mailto:mmason@ctpost.com)

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OXFORD — Anyone in need of a little extra security may be interested in talking with Amy Cote and some of her martial arts students.

They hold claim to being the best among their peers.

Cote's Institute of Martial Arts in Oxford was chosen as the School of the Year by the Master Cheezic Tang Soo Do Federation. Cheezic's federation includes more than 70 programs from all over the world, though most are based in New England.

Cote said she did not think the Oxford program, operated under the town's Parks and Recreation Department, would bring home the award at last month's federation banquet in Southington. She said she was about to leave when it was announced that the program she started five years ago was tops.

"I was shocked when it happened. I couldn't believe we were honored, with so many other schools," Cote said. Members of the IMA-Oxford program celebrated the honor at a ceremony Thursday at Oxford High School. But they had seen the trophy two weeks earlier when Cote surprised them with it during a class.

"I kind of hid it in a box," Cote said. "I let them all come up and see it. It was like the Super Bowl (trophy). They all wanted to touch it and hold it."

Grand Master Robert Cheezic, leader of the Cheezic Federation, said the award is not only based on the students' ability to perform at sparring and forms tournaments or how they handle weapons. It also covers how students do in school, their behavior in the community and how they demonstrate leadership and discipline.

"There's a lot of respect and the discipline. If you're not disciplined, it doesn't happen," he said. Zachary Geffert, 10, said he was "pretty psyched" knowing his karate school can call itself No. 1.

"I was like 'Are you sure?' " said Geffert, who won a pair of individual awards at the Cheezic Federation banquet. "It's awesome because they picked us because we worked the hardest for the whole year." Kathleen Mifflin, 14, started in IMA-Oxford five years ago and became a first-degree black belt last fall. Her most interesting challenge is trying to break a board with her head. Mifflin said she's proud to see Cote's program grow and is happy with the recognition.

"I think [Cote] is an amazing instructor and the students are all great. You have to be a good instructor to have great students," Mifflin said.

Cote, a third-degree black belt, said the award is the result of the hard work of her students. "I'm very proud that they're the school of the year," Cote said. "For me, it's the students who've earned this."

IMA-Oxford includes classes from preschool Little Ninjas and elementary school-aged Kicking Kids through Family Karate classes and Black Belt and weapons classes. For more information, contact Cote at [Oxfordkarate@yahoo.com](mailto:Oxfordkarate@yahoo.com)

Melvin Mason, who covers the Naugatuck Valley,

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