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Michael Coccaro holds Emily Rotkewicz, 7, from Danbury while Tony Franqueira, 17, from New Fairfield assists on June 19 at Kickaro's Martial Arts and Fitness in Brookfield.

The right kicks

By Stephanie Lyons Schultz
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Local martial arts instructor motivates kids

Michael Coccaro, 26, owner of Kickaro's Martial Arts and Fitness, is passionate about his craft. He began teaching Tae Kwon Do classes at age 14 and was running his own martial arts studio by age 16. He also has an infectious way of bonding with people — just ask anyone who has met him or has taken his classes.

"He just has magic with children," said Wendi Bivaro of Bethel. Her children, Emily, 12, and Nicholas, 9, are students at Coccaro's Brookfield school.

"My daughter started with him when she was 4," Bivaro said. "She just took to Michael. She was stuck to him like glue.

"What he has done for my children is priceless," Bivaro said.

After Coccaro left the previous center where he had taught Bivaro's children, Mom vowed to do anything she could to find him. Coccaro then spent some time giving private lessons to the children in their home before he opened his studio more than four years ago.

Emily and Nicholas signed up at the new studio — "from day one," Bivaro said.

Coccaro was 9 when he began training in Tae Kwon

Do, a Korean form of self-defense. At that age he already knew it was to be his life's ambition.

He had experienced a tough time following the death of his grandfather. Coccaro then found himself the target of bullies — that was when his parents enrolled him in martial arts.

"And I never looked back," he said.

When Carolyn Murphy's 8-year-old identical twin sons, Matthew and Michael, attended a birthday party at Kickaro's they were immediately hooked — and so was Mom.

"The boys absolutely fell in love with it — and him," Murphy said. "I have to admit, I did, too! He's such an awesome guy.

"He's also the type of guy who knows everybody personally," Mur-

phy continued. "He wants to know about your kids. I've always felt my kids were getting special attention — then I learned that other parents felt the same way. He just goes above and beyond."

Murphy's sons, the youngest of her six, were born prematurely and have been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Murphy was interested in finding ways to help them to focus better.

Coccaro gave Murphy a free coupon for the boys to come in and try things out.

"The boys couldn't wait to go," Murphy said. "They were in their karate outfits all the time." They initially enrolled for a year of classes; recently they signed on for another two years.

"I really didn't think they'd come this far," Murphy said. "It's incredible — the focus, the attention."

Murphy also took advantage of Kickaro's cardio kickboxing for herself and thoroughly enjoyed it. When she went back to work, however, she had a difficult time fitting it into her hectic schedule.

Among Kickaro's adult offerings, the kickboxing class is a comprehensive workout, Coccaro said, and a favorite of women. Men



Michael Coccaro speaks with students.

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