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Locals Bring Home the Gold, Silver and Black

GARNER, North Carolina (January 20, 2010) - Instructors and students from JKO Karate in Garner participated in the 37th Annual JKO Masters Seminars and Championships held on January 16-17 in San Diego, California. Held at the San Diego Convention Center, this international event has drawn competitors, officials and VIPs from as far away as Italy and from organizations as notable as the World Karate Federation and USA Karate.

This year's featured seminar on Saturday was taught by Hanshi Minobu Miki, head of the Japan Karate-do Organization. Hanshi Miki came to the United States from Japan in 1966 and founded the JKO in 1972 at the request of the Grandmaster in Japan. "We train hard and make sure to teach the tradition of karate-do," Miki said. "Having studied under the founder's son, it is important to me to teach my students what he taught me. This event is a big part of that." Miki earned his 8th degree black belt and the title of Hanshi, senior master, from Soke Kenzo Mabuni, son and heir of the founder of Shito-Ryu, the style of karate Miki teaches. Miki was the first person in the world outside of the Mabuni family to do so.

Saturday afternoon also saw advanced black belt rank testing. Sensei Ed Craft, owner and senior instructor at the Garner club, earned his 4th degree black belt and the title of Shihan-dai, interim master teacher. With over forty clubs in ten countries across the world, there are currently only five 4th degree black belts in the JKO, and Craft is the third to earn the title of interim master. Craft said, "Being part of a truly international karate organization with a history as long as the JKO's is great. Having Hanshi Miki invite me to test was really a tremendous privilege. But to be awarded Shihan-dai and join that small, elite group of instructors was truly an honor."

The tournament began Sunday morning as athletes, coaches and officials arrived eager to see long-time friends and compete. Sensei Henry Norris, 3rd degree black belt and assistant instructor at the Garner club, served as a ring controller and head referee, as did Craft. "Hanshi really puts on a great tournament. The quality of the competitors is second to none which makes for a great day, but everyone has a good time. The camaraderie throughout the organization is really refreshing," Norris relates.

JKO Karate student Bill Bowden made the trip to San Diego for the event. 53 years old, Bowden won first place in the Executive Men's Novice Forms division. "Training with Hanshi is always wonderful. Sensei getting new rank and title is cool too. But winning a gold medal to bring home is really the icing on the cake. What a great way to finish off an awesome trip," he said. His son, Ford, also competed, winning second place in the 15-16 year old Boys Novice Forms division. "Competing really helps me to improve myself. I'm able to learn how to work under pressure as well as learn from my mistakes. I may not have won this time, but I know what to improve for the next one," the silver medalist said.

JKO Karate in Garner is the only karate club in North Carolina affiliated with USA Karate and the US Olympic karate program. The club will celebrate its three year anniversary in March of this year with special events. To learn more, visit www.jkogarner.com or call (919)521-4438.