



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

John W. Mannion

Overcoming adversity in the dojo: Blind and autistic karate champion earns Senate commendation

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Senator John W. Mannion presents an official NYS Senate Commendation Award to Matthew Killian with Hanshi (Master) Rande Lawrence at Lawrence World Class Karate (LWCK) for winning two gold medals at the 2023 Niagara Karate Championship. Photo from John Ma

Sen. John Mannion presented Matthew Killian of Fayetteville with an official Senate Commendation for his two recent gold medals for Special Demonstration of kata and kumite at the 2023 Niagara Karate Championship on Sunday morning.

Killian, 24, is a student at Lawrence World Class Karate dojo in Fayetteville under the tutelage of Hanshi (Master) Rande Lawrence. He has successfully embraced karate as a means to break down personal barriers and overcome challenges.

He became blind at the age of 19 due to a rare disease called Leber Hereditary Optic Neuropathy (LHON) and has been an epileptic since the age of three. He was diagnosed with autism when he was 10 years old.

"Matthew's karate success comes from his hard work, determination, and unwavering spirit to overcome all obstacles. Like all great champions, he has a strong team that supports his efforts, including his family and his instructors at Lawrence World Class Karate dojo. On behalf of the New York State Senate, I strongly commend Matthew for his inspirational achievements," Sen. Mannion said.

Killian has been training on a one-on-one basis for over a year with Lawrence, head instructor at LWC Karate dojo. His lessons focus on learning karate katas (choreographed set pattern of movements) and Kubudo (weapon systems).

Matt's lack of vision means that he cannot easily emulate the various sequences of attacking and defensive hand and leg movements. He also has challenges with his balance and spatial requirements, all crucial aspects of karate.

"I am very excited and grateful to receive this award from Senator Mannion and it means a lot to me. I also want to thank Hanshi Rande Lawrence for being such a great teacher and mentor. Karate has given me so much and it is helping to shape a big part of who I am," Killian said.

Lawrence World Class Karate Dojo is the only karate school in Central New York specializing in traditional Japanese Shotokan and Okinawan Goju-Ryu Karate Systems.

A number of adults and children with an array of physical and mental challenges and disabilities are students at the school. Recently one of the Dojos' students, who has Down Syndrome, earned his fifth-degree black belt, which is believed to be a first in the USA.

See the article [here](#).