

# Local attorney combats stress with unique martial arts practice

By Tracy Carbasho

**N**ancy Heilman has a secret weapon to help her combat everyday stress and the inherent challenges of being an attorney.

In fact, she appeared on the Oprah show in February to share with the world the many physical, mental, and spiritual benefits that can be derived from practicing traditional Moo Doe martial arts taught through the School of Oom Yung Doe.

"Although I have always been fairly well organized, I believe the practice has honed my organizational skills because of developed habits of focus and concentration," she said. "The other mental advantage I have gained is the ability to stay calm in stressful situations, including at trial and under attack by an adversarial opposing counsel."

After becoming bored with monotonous aerobic routines and tedious exercise equipment, she decided to take her first lesson in 1994 at the age of 53.

Heilman, a director at Cohen & Grigsby who specializes in alternative dispute resolution and defends employers in all aspects of employment litigation, has attained the national level of fourth-degree black belt.

She was asked to demonstrate some of the Moo Doe movements and weapons on Oprah after members of the show's staff read an article about her that appeared in *More Magazine* in August 2007. Although the television segment was relatively short, she received phone calls from colleagues and friends from all over the United States who had watched Oprah on that particular day.

"I was amazed by how many people tape the show while at work and watch it later," she said.

As a certified assistant regional head instructor, Heilman teaches in a supporting capacity whenever her schedule enables her to be in school. Her professional responsibilities as an attorney do not permit her to commit to teaching on a regular basis.

She said attorneys are typically good students because they already have the necessary focus and they can usually realize immediate physical and mental benefits. For example, one attorney she assisted in training was able to lose weight and gain enhanced alertness.

"The life of an attorney is not necessarily conducive to internal and exter-

nal physical conditioning. What I found shortly after I began practicing was that my levels of extrinsic stress—the negative kind that keeps one in an anxiety spiral—greatly reduced without reducing levels of the intrinsic stress that allows one to focus on doing a good job," said Heilman. "I can work longer without fatigue, can move quickly, rarely have a cold and never have headaches.

"One thing I notice about attorneys is that they develop bad posture, which displaces all of the internal organs and can lead to physical deterioration and diseases. These are things I hope to continue to avoid through practice. Physically, we are looking to develop all of the organs of the body, the bones, joints, ligaments, etc."

Moo Doe works all parts of the body together, whereas a particular sport develops specific aspects of the body in isolation. Heilman said the physical benefit of Moo Doe is self-defense not only from the external forces of attack, but also from the internal negativity associated with disease and a deteriorating physiological condition.

Studies show the physical practice leads to internal conditioning that can ward off diseases and the negative effects of aging. Ultimately, the object of Moo Doe practice is to develop a physical condition that allows one sufficient comfort to have increased mental concentration. Heilman said physical comfort and mental concentration are prerequisites for meditation, which is an important part of Moo Doe practice.

"The mental aspect of the practice is extremely important because focus and concentration are two elements of being able to move properly, effectively and safely with or without a weapon," she said. "Physical focus and concentration translate into mental focus and concentration. Developing focus helps in performing the daily tasks of being an attorney, avoiding distraction and prioritizing according to timing and importance. Practitioners actually find that practicing saves them time because they have additional energy to put in a longer and more effi-



Nancy Heilman

cient day."

Heilman said the object of Moo Doe is to create harmony of mind, body, and spirit. She stressed that it is not a hobby, but rather a lifestyle that includes the actual practice, as well as the use of herbal applications and equipment and the use of herbal teas and baths to remove toxins and promote internal conditioning.

"Traditional Moo Doe is how martial arts was practiced in ancient times and is still practiced in Asia," she said. "When schools were started in the United States, more typically practitioners concentrated on developing a single style. That is why people think almost solely in terms of Karate or Tae Kwon Do when they think of martial arts."

Moo Doe consists of studying eight different styles of martial arts combined into one practice. Even though it may take longer to become a master, Heilman enjoys the practice of the various styles.

In particular, Moo Doe includes the study of:

- Bagwa Chung, which develops internal and external strength by walking smoothly and lightly and reversing in offensive and defensive movements like a coiled spring to develop speed and power;
- Kung Fu, which includes hard and soft movements to develop flexibility, coordination, strength, and speed with offensive and defensive movement both straight and in circles to imitate animals, such as the tiger or monkey, and nature forms, such as ocean waves;
- Tai Chi Chung, which is a slow and graceful style where the speed of the breathing matches the speed of the movements to develop internal strength, physical well-being and overall good health;
- Hap Ki Do/Ai Ki Do, which features movements that target joints, pressure points and nerves, using the hands and feet in offensive and defensive movements, striking in all directions;
- Ship Pal Gae, which uses 18 weapons to help develop strong eye contact, flexibility, coordination, strength, and speed;

- Udo/Ju Jitsu, which develops proper falling techniques by keeping the body flexible and using the opponent's strength against him/her;

- Kom Do/Samurai, which develops mental alertness by requiring strong eye contact with opponent;

- Kong Su/Tae Kwon Do, which focuses more on movements of the feet, rather than the hands, for self-defense.

Heilman encourages anyone who would like to learn more about this practice of martial arts to visit the national website at [www.oomyungdoe.com](http://www.oomyungdoe.com).

There are currently two schools in Pittsburgh, with one in Mt. Lebanon and the other in Squirrel Hill.

Heilman is studying and training as part of an international program. Locally, a sixth-degree assistant national instructor helps her with training.

She also takes lessons given by eighth-degree international instructors five times per year. These lessons include international-level training in Pittsburgh three times a year, a weekend seminar in western Pennsylvania once a year and a week-long seminar that takes place in a mountain, desert, or seashore environment on an annual basis. During the week-long seminar, participants practice for approximately six hours per day.

"I have made a lot of friends from all over the country and some international friends during my years of practice," said Heilman.

Even more important to Heilman is the fact that her two sons and her daughter-in-law also practice Moo Doe. Her son Bradley, who was instrumental in convincing her to start taking lessons, is a sixth-degree regional head instructor. Nathan is a second-degree instructor and a veterinarian, while his wife, Therese Fafard, is a fourth-degree assistant regional head instructor.

Heilman also has three daughters, including Rene, who is an attorney; Amy, who has a degree in Asian medicine, practices acupuncture and manages Life Stream Purification Systems; and Erika, who is an executive editor for Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

Heilman received her law degree in 1987 from the University of Pittsburgh. She is a Federal Bar Association mediation training coach and serves as a mediator and neutral evaluator by appointment for the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania. ■