

## Martial arts with heart

Youngster gets a kick out of raising funds for cancer research

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### Staff Writer



**Millstone's Michael Ragosa, 4, and his sister, Grace, 6, demonstrate their martial arts skills at United TaeKwonDo in Manalapan.**

MILLSTONE - Michael Ragosa could have asked for any of the latest toys for his fourth birthday, but he didn't.

In lieu of gifts this year, Michael encouraged his friends to make contributions to the Embrace Kids Foundation in New Brunswick, formerly known as the Institute for Children with Cancer and Blood Disorders.

His interest in the foundation stemmed from his martial arts classes at the United TaeKwonDo Academy in Manalapan.

Every year, United TaeKwonDo works to raise money for a specific charity with Martial Arts with Hearts, a Freehold-based nonprofit founded in March 2004 that helps raise funds for various children's charities through annual karate demonstrations.

Bryan Klein, owner of Manalapan's United TaeKwonDo and co-founder of Martial Arts with Hearts, said he was very surprised by Michael's thoughtful gesture.

"To forgo gifts on his birthday to give to others demonstrated outstanding character and a level of maturity," Klein said of Michael, who has a green belt. "It makes me very proud to call Michael Ragosa a student."

This year, Martial Arts with Hearts aimed to raise \$100,000 for the Embrace Kids Foundation, which is a nonprofit organization that supports the nonmedical needs of children and their families at The Cancer Institute of New Jersey and The Bristol-Myers Squibb Children's Hospital at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital, both on Robert Wood Johnson's

medical campus in New Brunswick. According to the foundation's Web site, the nonmedical needs include counseling, transportation and informative teaching sessions.

Through his efforts, Michael raised \$750 for the foundation.

In a letter, the foundation recognized Michael's efforts, saying, "It is so moving to see such selflessness and heartfelt care for the needs of others in such a young child. We greatly appreciate your support of our mission to improve the lives of children facing cancer or a blood disorder."

Michael's mother, Maria, said she is truly blessed.

"To know that Michael wanted nothing more than to help others - and that Martial Arts with Hearts is just as passionate about giving as he is - really is something we are all grateful for."

As a result of helping Martial Arts with Hearts, she said that Michael and his 6-year-old sister, Grace, have decided that each year they will request donations toward the organization's annual charity in lieu of birthday gifts.

Although kids like Michael who take martial arts classes in local United TaeKwonDo Academies hosted all kinds of events to raise money to help Martial Arts with Hearts collect \$100,000 for the foundation, the organization fell \$7,000 short of its 2006-07 goal.

Hoping to gain quick fundraising momentum for its next cause - autism research - Martial Arts with Hearts is announcing that its next event will take place Jan. 27, 2008, at the Collins Arena on Brookdale Community College's Lincroft campus in Middletown. Those interested in attending or making a pledge toward autism research should call Bryan Klein at (732) 536-4797 or visit [www.mawh.org](http://www.mawh.org).