



Rob Ostermaier/The Gazette

Willie "The Bam" Johnson works with one of his students Friday at his Kung Fu school in Laurel.

Fighting drug abuse with Kung Fu

by **Maishah English**

- Staff Writer

One of the first lessons a student of BAM's Kung Fu school learns is the value of respect. Respect for one's self and respect for others.

This is just one of the many principles instructor Willie "the Bam" Johnson hopes to instill in his BAM (Better Attitude Makers) team.

These team members make up part of the family of a not-so-typical martial arts school. On any given day, BAM team members can be found cleaning the dojo (martial arts classroom) and working as in-

structors in one of the many classes taught to the general public. They greet visitors with a "hello sir" or "hello ma'am" showing signs of respect they learn through the study of martial arts.

"In the old martial arts schools, students would clean to help teach closeness," Johnson, 36, said. "It helps to make them feel more like family."

While BAM instructs its students in self-defense, more attention is paid to discipline, concentration and spirituality - all highly valued martial arts principles.

Johnson teaches young people

how to be proud, as well as the value of leadership and making good choices.

He teaches these things because he learned the hard way, growing up in a rough housing project in Baltimore.

His distinguished martial arts career, which he began at age 6, was interrupted in 1989 by a one-year prison term — the result of drug and alcohol abuse. That time of his life, he said, was a blessing in disguise.

"It was through martial arts I

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