

## THINGS TO DO

# Kickboxing provides 'pathway to recovery' for those battling addictions



Participants work out in a studio. Sessions generally last about an

hour, including warm-up stretches. (Photo courtesy of Mike Gould)

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By **MARK E LETT** |

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The road to recovery from addiction sometimes means bringing along gloves, workout clothes, tennis shoes and a martial arts heavy bag.

With those in hand, the next step is to hit the gym and start “kicking it.”

It’s all part of the culture inside the Smash Hit Kickboxing Club in Pontiac, where they describe kickboxing as “a transformative journey with inherent recovery assets that go beyond the punches and kicks.”

For Ken Levy, a former addict and champion kickboxer who operates the club, kickboxing is more than a sport. He sees the ancient martial art as a powerful tool to support healing for body and mind.

“It’s a pathway to recovery,” said Levy, 63, a Berkley High School graduate who has operated Smash Hit for more than a decade.

“And it can benefit anyone.”



Ken Levy and Mike Gould lead classes at Smash Hit Kickboxing Club in Pontiac. (Photo courtesy of Mike Gould)

Levy and a father-son team of Mike and Paul Gould have trained thousands in kickboxing and martial arts. Along the way, their sessions have proven helpful for individuals battling addiction to drugs and alcohol.

Between the three, they have more than seven decades of martial arts experience.

Smash Hit has offered targeted Recovery Kickboxing sessions since 2011. Now, the studio seeks to expand the program to accommodate more individuals looking for a healthier lifestyle.

At 81, Mike Gould is a familiar face at Smash Hit, leading classes in martial arts and advocating enthusiastically for the benefits of kickboxing.

“We carry a lot of negative stuff in our head – we all do,” he said. “But when you come in here, you can leave that at the front door and focus on something that helps your physical and mental health.”

Added son Paul, 55: “The cool thing is that people who thought they couldn’t do it find they can.”

Recovery kickboxing is not about smash-mouth physical contact. And while self-defense is essential, so, too, is self-control.

Participants work out in a studio featuring workout space, a portable area similar to a boxing ring, training bags, kick-blocking shields and hand-protecting gloves and hand-wraps. Sessions generally last about an hour, including warm-up stretches.



Paul Gould and Ken Levy train people at Smash Hit Kickboxing Club in Pontiac. (Photo courtesy of Mike Gould)

Levy said instruction and training methods guide attendees through low-impact classes to build skills, self-confidence, teamwork and camaraderie.

“I was an addict for much of my life,” said Levy, who credits kickboxing with providing a powerful supplement to other means and methods for recovery from addiction.

Success through recovery kickboxing, he said, calls for blending skills, finesse, rhythm and technique with controlled breathing, relaxation, mental focus and managed power.

“You learn to control your body,” Levy said. “Every motion has a starting point to take you from A to B, mimicking natural body motion.

Kickboxing serves as a catalyst for replacing poor habits with healthy activity, he said. The sport offers movement, stress release, goal-setting, self-confidence and a respite from cravings and negative thinking.

Healing happens, it has been said, when negative thinking is broken down and confidence is built up.

“There is a huge connection between mind and body,” said Jessica Topor, an Oakland County licensed marriage and family therapist – and a kickboxing enthusiast for some 10 years. “It not only moves your body, it stretches your mind, as well.”

Moreover, participants who work out with others “build a sense of community which is highly important in recovery,” she said.

Both Levy and Topor said kickboxing provides those in recovery a beneficial physical outlet without downside consequences.

Levy described the experience as a cleansing, “cathartic release.”

Added Topor: “There’s nothing like hitting a 50-pound bag every day.”

The program is free, but attendees can make a donation to support the recovery kickboxing program.

*Smash Hit Kickboxing Club is located at 48 N. Saginaw St., Pontiac.*

*For more information, visit [recoverykickboxing.com](http://recoverykickboxing.com).*



Kelly Willis and Scot Mather are two of the longest-serving participants of the recovery kickboxing program at Smash Hit Kickboxing Club in Pontiac. (Photo courtesy of Mike Gould)

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