

Champs will help tourism kick in

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Tyler Weaver's acrobatics were a crowd-pleaser in Camana Bay.

Word of the Night of Champions martial arts display in Cayman over the weekend is sending ripples around the karate world, a potential boost for local sports tourism.

Twelve world champions from Team Paul Mitchell performed spectacular forms and weapons for an appreciative audience at the Camana Bay Arts and Recreation Centre on Saturday.

The evening started with organizer Bob Daigle's students from Cayman Karate Academy School at Prospect Primary and Body Sculptor Fitness Centre giving an impressive display themselves.

Tyler Weaver, Caitlin Dechelle and Jackson Rudolph were the biggest names in Team Paul Mitchell, and their performances and others were all recorded by Maurice Elmalem, editor of the martial arts magazine Budo International.

Don Rodrigues, Team Paul Mitchell's co-founder and head coach, said the group enjoyed every aspect of the five-day trip.

"Everybody had a great time and we accomplished so much as a team," he said. "The workouts and all the performances that they did was really a positive thing."

Rodrigues was last in Cayman with a Team Paul Mitchell group in 1998 and was amazed at how much Grand Cayman has evolved.

"The island is gorgeous right now," he said. "The stuff that's going on here is awesome. I'm really excited, and we'll be back."

Rodrigues intends to return annually and expand the group to include former Team Paul Mitchell members, including some who visited Cayman decades ago and would like to see the upgrades.

He added that the performers are so competitive that they “each tried to outdo themselves, even though it was not a competition.”

The team, mostly based in the U.S., but including one person who traveled from Budapest, Hungary, went to Stingray City, Jet Skied, snorkeled and enjoyed sightseeing. They also had a workout at Public Beach.

“The camaraderie and bonding we got, you just can’t describe it,” Rodrigues said.

He was full of praise for Daigle. “Bob worked extremely hard to put this on in trying to get sponsors,” he said. “What he’s done is to make an awareness of martial arts in the Cayman Islands, he really has.

“I think it’s good for us and good for the kids. All of our people have been on Facebook, and those seeing it are impressed and I believe a lot of them are going to want to come. This was an incredible, positive trip all the way around. That’s why we brought Maurice [Elmalem]. With the publicity in Budo International, which will go around the world, it will be incredible.”

Elmalem, a Spanish national who now lives in Valencia but lived in the U.S. for most of his adult life, holds eight Guinness World Records for shattering plates of glass with his bare hands. He also praised Daigle and promised a positive piece about the Night of Champions and Cayman generally.

A multiple world champion and Olympic silver medalist for the USA team at the 1988 Seoul Olympics, Elmalem has a global contacts network and he intends to rave about Cayman’s qualities in his magazine.

He used to give glass-breaking demonstrations on a monthly basis, but at 62 with numerous demands on his time, the qualified architect who runs his own practice employing dozens of people, is more selective now. Semiretired from performing, he kindly excited the Cayman audience by jumping over two chairs to break a block of wood.

“The Cayman Islands is wonderful, so beautiful,” said Elmalem, who went to Stingray City, shopped and scuba dived. “Everybody is so kind here, and people should know about Cayman because it is really nice.”

For more information on Daigle’s karate classes, email bobdaigle@me.com.