



Welcome to the DNR Archives!

[Return to Search](#) | [Home](#)



Search...

Archives

ARCHIVE NEWS ARTICLE

[Back to Search Results](#) | [Printer Friendly Version](#)

Daily News-Record (Harrisonburg, VA)

February 15, 2012

Section: News-Local

Learning A Lost Art

EMILY SHARRER

HARRISONBURG - As Bridgewater College professor Gavin Lawson called out "Cut!" 14 duct-tape-wrapped swords swung through the air in unison at the Funkhouser Center for Health and Wellness on Tuesday.

With each of Lawson's commands, students took abrupt steps forward, making swift swings with their wooden wasters like a group of well-trained assassins.

Substitute the students' screen T's and sneakers for armor, and Lawson's class, classically trained in the 16th century art of European swordplay, could very well make up the college's first militia.

At the head of the class, Lawson, a 44-year-old associate professor of biology, stands wearing black gloves and boots and his homemade chain-mail armor, which he pulled in at the waist with a belt.

"I always loved wearing the garb," he said. "Plus, [wearing] 30 pounds of chain mail is a really good workout."

This is the third semester Lawson has offered the sword-fighting class, which he says is in high demand.

"It's probably the best decision I've made for an elective," said Erin Pampe, 21, of Winchester, who said Lawson's European sword-fighting course is a cut above other physical education course offerings. "I'm hoping to properly learn how to storm a castle."

A Brief History

Lawson began learning the art of sword fighting 20 years ago through a living-history group to satisfy an interest in medieval weaponry he'd harbored since he was a boy.

European sword fighting, or Western martial arts as it's commonly known, grew in popularity 25 to 30 years ago when people started piecing together information about the discipline from centuries-old manuals, Lawson said.

That explains why the class, taught for 50 minutes on Tuesdays and Thursdays, is wrought with historic German terminology.

"[The class] is a nice balance between giving historical information and actually practicing the drills," Pampe said.

The use of a sword as a practical military weapon fell out of favor in Western Europe by the early 1600s, as the introduction of gunpowder and early muskets made them obsolete, according to Lawson.

The art of swordplay, however, continues to be perfected by its most faithful devotees, although somewhat "under the radar," he said.

"Everybody's a scholar and everybody's a student at the same time," Lawson said.

Advertisement



New Trick in Virginia
If you drive 25 mi/day or less you better read this...



53yr Old Mom LOOKS 33 Again!
New discovery enables women to erase wrinkles in a matter of weeks



Bridgewater: Mom Makes \$72/Hour Online
We Investigated How She Makes \$8,000/Month. You Won't Believe How...

Advertisement

Advertisement

Advertisement

The class has managed to convert many faithful followers at Bridgewater, as evidenced by the 22 members who have joined the BC Comitatus swordsmanship club since its inception last fall.

Freshman Ibrahim Abunada, 20, of the Gaza Strip, said he's always admired sword fighting from afar and is happy to try his hand at it this semester.

"I think it's like my new hobby," he said.

Contact Emily Sharrer at 574-2686 or esharrer@dnronline.com

Bridgewater College professor Gavin Lawson (right) and his teaching assistant, junior Shawn Vernier, 21, demonstrate a technique during their sword-fighting class Tuesday.

Senior Erin Pampe, 21, of Winchester, practices a drill in class Tuesday.

Bridgewater College senior Brian Thomas, 22, and junior Khristina Shindyapin, 22, spar during Gavin Lawson's sword-fighting class Tuesday. (Photos by Nikki Fox / DN-R)

IMG><http://www.dnronline.com/img/uploads/thumbnails/4f3b4313-4dc4-4db2-94e9-73730a4809bc.jpg>

p/> <http://www.dnronline.com/img/uploads/thumbnails/4f3b435a-ce8c-448b-927f-73920a4809bc.jpg>

p/> <http://www.dnronline.com/img/uploads/thumbnails/4f3b43cf-e290-47c1-be66-73aa0a4809bc.jpg>

/IMG>

Copyright (c) 2012, Byrd Newspapers, All Rights Reserved.