



Practicing their fencing moves are Bob Harder, left, and Don Uy, co-founders of the Fencers of Tampa Bay.

Sherri VandeSande/CARROLLWOOD NEWS

Touche!

Local fencer teaches ancient art

BY SHERRI VANDESANDE
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Whether driven by the desire to relive medieval time or just for health benefits, people still study the art of fencing. And instructor Bob Harder is proof that it's never too late to become the world's next D'Artagnan.

Harder, 73, is co-founder of the Fencers of Tampa Bay, an instructional fencing club designed to teach students the basic techniques necessary to rival a Musketeer. He, along with partner Don Uy, 25, founded the club last October to pass on the art Harder learned years ago from a traveler and honed with the help of a French master.

Admittedly going the "D'Artagnan route," Harder first became interested in fencing when a summer visitor in his Pennsylvania hometown began offering classes.

"I just read *The Three Musketeers* and thought, hey, this would be neat," he recalled with a smile.

From the first clink of metal on metal, Harder was hooked. At Pennsylvania State University he joined the fencing team and became its captain during his senior year. But it was during World War II that Harder truly learned to appreciate the sport.

While stationed in Paris he sought instruction from a fencing master and soon started taking four to five classes a week under Maurice Gardere, who taught him traditional European techniques.

"It was there where the people knew what the sport was," Harder said.

Though he eventually became a philosophy professor, Harder continued to teach others the sport and still does out of tribute to Gardere.

"I decided that man is never going to die," Harder said. "What he gave me, I'm going to give someone else. This is a mission."

That mission is becoming reality for Harder, whose students are excelling in com-

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petitions. His partner and student, Uy started training with him about three years ago after having four months of previous schooling. Uy since has completed a coaching course in Colorado Springs and graduated at the top of his class. He also has taken top awards at various tournaments and is well on his way to becoming a world-class fencer, Harder said.

Other students have also faired well in competition. During the recent Sunshine State Games in Tallahassee, the Fencers of Tampa Bay took nine titles. In the ladies' foil division Terry Abrahams took first and Julia McQueen, an assistant instructor, took second. In the men's foil, Uy took sixth, Jay Livingston won fifth, Jimmy McQueen won seventh and Andrew Stroud took ninth. Uy also took seventh place in the men's epee division and Abrahams won third place in the women's division. In the saber, Stroud

took a third place.

The Fencers of Tampa Bay meet at Jackson Springs Recreation Center in Town 'n Country and at Northlakes Recreation Center in Carrollwood. The cost is \$35 per month or \$5 per class.

Harder encourages anyone interested in learning how to fence to come to a class.

"There are a lot of D'Artagnan lovers among beginners," Harder said. "It turns out to be a bit of work." But those who stick with it "begin to like the sport for the emotional and mental gain."

He warns, however, the sport is one that requires dedication, stamina and patience to learn.

"It's lightfooted and explosive, not a sport for swimmers," he said. "(But at 73), I'm a living, breathing example of why you should go out for fencing."

For more information about the Fencers of Tampa Bay call Harder at 888-5870.