

## Heidi Goldstein-Sidley

### *The martial artist*

By Bill Fallon  
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**B**lack becomes Heidi Goldstein-Sidley. She favors black in belts. She has two.

These are the kind of black belts – in Cuong Nhu and judo/jujitsu – that make statements about dedication and self-knowledge and at the same time pack a wallop. Goldstein-Sidley can break either five 1-inch-thick boards stacked or a two-by-four with a single kick. “Side kick and front thrust kick are my two most powerful techniques.”

In the Paris subways, a would-be pickpocket caught a judo move that left him, one hopes, contemplating a new career path; he did not get Goldstein-Sidley’s wallet. “I had him in a hold before he knew what hit him.” It was a judo hold, leveraging the crook’s jacket against him.

Goldstein-Sidley’s martial arts formidability segues to her position as executive vice president and managing director of Madison Pension Services Inc. on Westchester Avenue in Purchase in ways that do not involve chopping the boardroom table in half.

“I use it very much in my everyday life,” she says of her training. “The philosophy of Cuong Nhu – Vietnamese for the hard and the soft – is to live in the moment.

It can be leaned on when you need a bit of guidance. And then there’s the self-confidence.”

Goldstein-Sidley’s world comes with its own glossary, including a definition for the five A’s – awareness, alertness, avoidance, anticipation, action. Another alliterative list – the D’s – offers a peak into Goldstein-Sidley’s mindset: “The last one is ‘do till death.’ And I sort of apply that to everything I do. I jump in head first. If I fail, I fail. Touch wood – I haven’t had many failures. I put all my energy into everything I do, be it family, community, work or sports.”

Goldstein-Sidley is a poster woman for physical activity, radiating energy and good karma on a recent bright afternoon. Given warm weather, she bicycles the five miles from her home to her office.

Her smile is big and she flashes it at the mention of her family: 3 1/2-year-old Benjamin Sidley and 6-month-old Isobel Sidley, and her husband Craig Sidley. She describes herself as an athlete. She is seated chatting, coincidentally, but a mile from White Plains High School, where she played basketball, softball, field hockey, soccer and swam. She also credits a pair of brothers with keeping her reflexes sharp.



**Occupation:** Pension management  
**Passion:** Martial arts  
**Works in:** Purchase  
**Lives in:** White Plains

People comment on her hair, which is very fine and very thick, the stuff of ads for high-end conditioners. She keeps it shoulder length after a Cuong Nhu master put her in a choke hold with her once-long braid. If that hardly seems fair, know that Cuong Nhu draws from seven different martial arts, each with its own history and skill set: boxing and judo are two; a third is vovinam, a martial art native to Vietnam. Picking on a Cuong Nhu practitioner is like fighting a battalion.

After White Plains High School, Goldstein-Sidley, 37, earned a bachelor’s degree in applied math and statistics at SUNY Stony Brook. She is a trained actuary as well: “Two years (of) graduate studies at Georgia State in Atlanta and then I took the Society of Actuaries’ associate exams.” She smiles, looking still very much the college student. “Passed.”

Most people experience martial arts in the movies and Goldstein-Sidley is a fan of the genre. She liked “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon,” the big kung-fantasy hit. (Movie idea: front thrust-kicking black belt who’s an applied mathematician and actuary uncovers pension high jinks and kicks the bad guys’ asterisks. Rated PG-13 for financial shenanigans and asterisk-kicking.)

She worked in Paris, France, for Sherman and Sterling, the white-shoe New York City law firm, from 1999 to 2005 and is fluent in French. (Fluent in judo, too, as that Parisian pickpocket learned.)

Madison Pension has 20 employees. Goldstein-Sidley has been there two-and-a-half years.

“We implement and help run successful retirement plans,” she says. Madison Pension’s client list goes from a company with a single employee to national outfits like Hampshire Hotels and Safra Bank (assets of \$57 billion and client assets of \$78 billion) with thousands of employees.

Goldstein-Sidley ran a martial arts school in Paris and hopes by year’s end to open one here at her synagogue community center at Congregation Kol Ami in White Plains. She now teaches Cuong Nhu and judo, in French, to children at the Westchester Judo Club on Weaver Street in Scarsdale.

For such a full life, Goldstein-Sidley tries always to carry an empty cup. She tells the fable of the Zen master and the know-it-all student. The moral is to jettison preconceptions and to approach situations with the willingness to have your cup filled with new experiences and new knowledge. “I’ve been a lot of places and learned a lot of things,” she says. “But every time I sit down with someone I

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