earning far less. So he fought as an amateur, eventually winning the Southern New England Golden Gloves in 1978, at 175 pounds. A year later, he walked away from the ring. Almost 30, he was getting too old, and with five kids, didn’t have the time.

For the next 20 years, O’Brien stayed in shape with carpentry and karate, earning a black belt and winning titles. In 1995, he helped train a friend for a masters boxing tournament, then decided to fight himself.

“Boxing is like drugs,” he says. “You miss it when you don’t do it.”

At BU, his students are mostly men, but there are a half dozen women.

“I thought boxing would be just punching, but it’s a summation of all these little movements,” says Dolaty. “It doesn’t look like it, but the footwork, going around and around, is really tiring.”

O’Brien teaches boxing from the feet up, he says, because even a powerhouse swing won’t save a fighter who can’t move well. He also does it to test his students and see if they can stick with the boring stuff, the shuffling and the endless crunches and one-armed push-ups—to see if they have guts.

“If they stick with that,” O’Brien says, “I teach them how to punch.”

And that is what he is doing now, running them through boxing’s 14 punches. For safety reasons, the University doesn’t allow the students to spar, so they practice hitting only with gloves and pads. Jabs, hooks, and uppercuts are thrown, and the sound of irregular thumps fills the air. O’Brien weaves among them, adjusting the way one holds his pads, pulling pairs closer together, showing a female student how to shoot her fist straight from her shoulder.

“He’s a good teacher,” says Sean Slattery (CAS’14). “He shows you what you need to do, rather than telling you what you’re doing wrong.”

Since he retired from carpentry in 1999, O’Brien spends six days a week boxing, either teaching or working out himself. When he’s not at BU, where he also teaches kickboxing and the fitness class called Bootcamp, O’Brien can be found shadowboxing in the South Shore YMCA pool (the water is forgiving on knees stiff from years of carpentry), in Hanover, Mass., or at the Cyr-Farrell Boxing Gym in Quincy, Mass., teaching everyone from junior high school students to businessmen. The kids he teaches there (free) often come from difficult home situations and need the discipline and self-esteem boxing provides.

On a December afternoon at the Quincy gym, O’Brien dons headgear, an abdomen guard, and gloves, his knee braces showing below his shorts. After three rounds of three minutes each with four kids, O’Brien steps heavily through the ropes. He’s breathing hard and sweat glistens on his face, chest, and arms.

“Who wants to fight?” he calls, his mouth guard muffling his words. “Who’s coming in with the old guy?”

AMY SUTHERLAND

Pops on Tap for Alumni Weekend in September

Performance will take place at Agganis Arena

Alumni, family, and friends who attend Alumni Weekend 2012, September 21 to 23, will have the opportunity to see a first: the Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra, led by conductor Keith Lockhart (Hon,’04) (top), performing at Agganis Arena on the Charles River Campus. The marquee event, which is open to the entire BU community, will take place on Saturday, September 22.

Alumni Weekend will have events for every taste and interest, including receptions, celebrations, school and college events, panel discussions, and ribbon-cutting ceremonies for two new buildings at BU: the six-story Center for Student Services in East Campus (center), which will house dining facilities and the relocated Center for Career Development and the Educational Resource Center, and the School of Medicine’s student residence, at 815 Albany St. (bottom), a nine-story complex with 104 two-bedroom apartments, as well as retail and common space.

Visit bu.edu/alumniweekend to learn more about all of the weekend’s events.