

Martial heart as phoenix rises from the ashes

SAM KELTON

MORE than five months after a huge fire all but destroyed his livelihood, grandmaster Cheok Leong finally has something to smile about.

The owner of the Wing Chun Kung Fu Academy lost almost everything when the large blaze brought the Adelaide CBD to a standstill last September.

Having read Mr Leong's story on Advertiser.com.au Melbourne kung fu instructor Maurice Ruiz felt compelled to help.

He drove more than 800km to yesterday deliver two handmade wooden dummies from China, a vital training tool in the ancient martial art and a priceless gift to Mr Leong.

"I saw his story on *The Advertiser's* website that the grandmaster had lost his equipment and I knew I had to help," Mr Ruiz said.

"These dummies would sell for thousands online and the small one is one of only five made and will really help the academy.

"I'm grateful for my students who pay their fees so we are financially able to do this for grandmaster."

Mr Leong said it was amazing that his story had reached as far as Melbourne.

The blaze started in the basement of the Hindley St business and quickly spread through the building, sending large, acrid smoke plumes throughout the CBD.



MADE TO MEASURE: Maurice Ruiz and Cheok Leong celebrate the installation of the dummies. Picture: MARK BRAKE

At least 20 appliances and 85 firefighters fought the blaze in buildings on Schrader St, behind Hindley St's Grand Chancellor Hotel, and four people, including a police officer, were taken to hospital for smoke inhalation.

Mr Leong said it had taken him months to get back on his feet as the academy was rebuilt, but through Mr Ruiz's efforts he knew it was not far away from completion.

"You don't expect something like this to happen in Adelaide – but to have someone from Melbourne donate these dummies – that's amazing," Mr Leong said.

"There's another two or three months of work here to do, we have done a lot of work – it was fully damaged."

Mr Leong praised the work of emergency services who made it possible for him to have something to rebuild.



OUT OF CONTROL: The fire that gutted the Wing Chun Kung Fu Academy in September.

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