

Wudang

Twin Cities T'ai Chi

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TEACHING THE ART, SCIENCE, AND SPIRIT OF T'AI CHI



From Sifu Paul

It's hard to believe that 2023 is coming to a close. As T.T. Liang was fond of saying, "You can't stop the sun from traveling east to west." Thanksgiving has come and gone, but my feeling of gratitude is still riding high. From our team of talented Instructors to our creative and hardworking board and all of our dedicated members, your presence at the studio makes it a joy to share, learn, and practice the art of T'ai Chi together.

In this issue, we remember some of the highlights of the past year, acknowledge those who make our studio such a great place to learn T'ai Chi, and let you know the status of some of our ongoing projects and what's on the horizon for the year ahead.

Studio Closing

The studio will be closed from Dec. 24 through Jan. 1 for a holiday/midwinter break and cleaning. We will reopen Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2024. Happy New Year!

Save the Date: Chinese New Year Celebration and Potluck

Feb. 10 from 4:00–8:00 p.m.

Join us for a potluck get-together at the studio to celebrate the New Year(s) East and West and to relax and have a little social time together. There will be a sign-up sheet at the studio and online, so stay tuned.



Fundraiser 2023: We Did It!

Thanks to all of you who contributed to this year's fundraiser. Your generous donations helped us make our \$5,000 matching grant, which is directed to supporting our mission and general operations, funding studio upgrades and equipment, continuing education, archival projects, and more. The fundraiser runs until the end of December, so there's still time to make an end-of-the-year tax-deductible donation.

The studio is its members, so we all benefit, with great gratitude to all our donors and members.

A New Year, a New Quarter

The new year will be here soon and a new quarter as well. Beginning in 2024, the studio will offer a family discount as well as a student discount of 10% off the price of membership.

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Holiday closing:

Dec. 24–Jan. 1

Classes resume on
Tuesday, Jan. 2.



Let It Snow

Winter in Minnesota is cold, beautiful, and snowy. In the interest of keeping the snow outside, please leave boots on the mats under the benches in the hallway before you come into the studio. Coats can be hung in the dressing rooms or the coat rack in the office by the desk. You may leave your boots on the mats there, too, if you carry them in.

If you come bundled up and want to change into lighter practice clothing and the dressing rooms feel a little too cozy or not private enough, there is a clean, spacious, gender-neutral bathroom on the lower level that is open to us, so feel free to change there.

It Was a Very Good Year

The year 2023 was one of new growth in terms of expanding both our membership and our curriculum.

Classes

- Thanks to our team of Instructors, our Saturday-morning beginning T'ai Chi class became so successful it needed to be divided into two separate classes.
- Tim and Lynn Dennis started a Beginning Solo Form class on Wednesday afternoons, providing a daytime opportunity to learn the T'ai Chi form.

- In November, we opened a Wednesday-evening Beginning Solo Form class, open to all members, that is already showing attendance in the high twenties.
- The T'ai Chi Symmetries classes are in full swing, with two groups learning the early symmetries, an advanced class learning the later ones, and a beginning class starting up in January.
- A full cycle of weapons classes was taught this year—Cane, Knife, Sword, Double Knife, and Fan—that will begin again starting in January.
- The Meditation and Qigong class is back on Monday nights with a rotating schedule of 8- to 12-week courses.

Check the *Wudang* newsletter and the website for new courses and class descriptions.

The Studio

- This year, we reopened our Community Room, complete with a new spring water dispenser for members to have fresh drinking water. We will continue to refine the space, make the bulletin boards more informative, and encourage members to pull up a seat, relax, and have a conversation. Your suggestions are welcome.

Graduation News

Congratulations to Jane Untz for learning the complete T'ai Chi Ch'uan Solo Form.

Contact Us

For timely updates, follow Twin Cities T'ai Chi Ch'uan on Facebook.

Email: mail@tctaichi.org

Website: tctaichi.org

Phone: 651.767.0267.

All articles and other content created by Paul Abdella unless otherwise noted.

- This fall, we had a full studio cleaning.
- For the first time in our 30-year history, we cooled our practice room a bit with air conditioning.
- The studio hosted its annual Summer Social picnic on August 12, and the typically hot and sultry month produced a perfect-weather day for us. Seventy people attended and enjoyed a picnic lunch, some T'ai Chi demonstrations, and each other.
- Our T'ai Chi in the Park class on Wednesday evening ran from May to October with a well-attended season of outdoor practice and some big nature energy to fuel the fun. Join us next season for a bit of paradise.

Branding

- Studio member Todd Nesser designed a beautiful new T-shirt for us that's been extremely popular, and Drew Johnson put it into production and got it printed and distributed to everyone.
- Finally, studio member and media director Dan Polsfuss and Sifu Paul are producing a T'ai Chi Solo Form instructional course. Stay tuned for more updates as the course gets closer to completion.



Instructors

It's hard to overstate the importance and impact a good teacher can have on a student. Our studio is unique, and with a teaching staff with more than 200 years of combined experience in studying, practicing, and teaching Yang-Style T'ai Chi Ch'uan, there's a teacher here for every learning style. Our Instructors are the backbone of the studio. A deep bow to you all.



- LaVonne Bunt, 26 years; Lynn Dennis, 27; Tim Dennis, 27; Tom Hautman, 24; Linda Hermanson, 35; Kim Husband, 26; Ralph Jerndal, 21; Christopher Knutson, 23; Stephen May, 15

Board of Directors

Our board is made up of our members, three officers (chair, treasurer, and secretary), and three at-large members. They meet for an hour each month to discuss studio business, offer creative ideas that resolve current issues, help to grow our membership, and keep the studio running smoothly.

If the Instructors are the backbone of the studio, the board is its nervous system. With deep gratitude and appreciation to:

- Stephen May, Board Chair; Michael Morley, Treasurer; Nancy Brown, Secretary; Libby Frost, Fran Myers, and Dave Sagisser, At-Large Members

We bid a fond farewell to Dave Sagisser, who leaves the board after serving two consecutive terms as an at-large board member. Dave brought his expertise in cybersecurity and his love for T'ai Chi and the studio to his service on the board, seeing us through some challenging times and sharing in many positive milestones. Thanks, Dave! We will miss you.

We welcome Tim Dennis to the board. In addition to Tim's role as an Instructor, he brings many years of practicing all aspects of T'ai Chi at the studio to the board.

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Thank you to the board for keeping our studio running smoothly!

Nancy Brown, our board secretary, has agreed to return for a full term in the new year. Thanks, Nancy, and welcome back.

Support Staff

When the studio looks beautiful, your calls get answered, and those intake forms are filed away and when the website, posters, and signs look like fine art, the newsletter looks amazing, and photos and video look like a pro did them, give a nod and a word of recognition to our spectacular support staff:

- LaVonne Bunt, housekeeping; Lynn Dennis, office manager; Lucia Pierson, office assistant; Todd Nesser, designer; Kim Husband, editor; Dan Polsfuss, media

Upcoming Classes

Qigong and Meditation

Mondays 7:30–8:30 p.m. Begins Jan. 8, 2024

The Inner Smile Meditation course will begin in January. It is a seated body–mind meditation practice that cultivates an unpolarized neutral energy called “yuan chi” (original chi or original breath). We will learn to move this neutral energy through five natural pathways in the body that develop a deep sense of unconditional self-acceptance.

Inner Smiling is a simple and practical way to connect to what the Chinese call “ling,” or our inner heart essence, helping us to be more accepting and spontaneous in expressing our unique and natural soul pattern.

This is a beginner-friendly class, so if you haven’t meditated before, there will be plenty of guidelines to help you build your practice in a natural and gradual manner. There will be short talks to prepare the process for each pathway, a short warm-up, and some discussion time to ask questions and share experiences.

T’ai Chi Symmetries

Tuesdays. Begins Jan. 2, 2024

Beginning and Intermediate: 6:00–7:15 p.m.

Advanced: 7:15–8:30 p.m.

The T’ai Chi Symmetries are short two-person forms that teach the martial applications of each of the postures in the T’ai Chi Solo Form in the order in which they appear in the form. Each Symmetry features a limited sequence of postures and repeats them with a partner, moving around the compass points of a circle. Three Symmetries cover the first section of the form, three more cover the second section, and two complete the third section.

There will be a new Symmetry 1 class beginning on Tuesday, Jan. 2, at 6:00–7:15 p.m. Those who are on the current waiting list can join the class. Others who are interested, have finished learning the Solo Form, and can perform it on their own should talk to Sifu Paul, Kim, or Stephen to be admitted to the class.

Current Symmetry students will advance to the next Symmetry.



T’ai Chi Weapons

Thursdays 7:30–8:30 p.m.

Begins Thursday, Jan. 18, 2024

If you have completed learning the Solo Form, you can begin to learn the T’ai Chi Cane Form. Weapons forms develop the energy of the Solo Form even further. The cane uses movements derived from both the sword and broadsword forms. It provides a varied range of movement with practical applications and is a perfect introductory weapon that requires only a simple stick to get started.

The T’ai Chi Cane form and single techniques will be taught. Sifu Paul and Instructor Tom Hautman will teach the class.

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New class: The cane is the perfect introductory weapon.



Remembering Robert

We remember Twin Cities T'ai Chi student, member, and friend Robert Skafte, who died Friday, Dec. 8.

Robert came to study T'ai Chi here in March of 2022. He began learning the Solo Form in our newly reopened, postpandemic T'ai Chi program on Saturday mornings. He worked with our instructors in small groups and began progressing through the sequence of T'ai Chi postures.

Whenever we were shorthanded, I would fill in and teach whatever group needed me. Eventually, I worked with a small group that Robert was in. I could tell by his movements that he was a dancer. I know this because I taught T'ai Chi in the University of Minnesota Department of Dance for more than 20 years. I had observed many dancers during that time and enjoyed trying to teach them something about T'ai Chi in just a semester or two.

Everyone is bad at T'ai Chi when they first begin—including me when I started. It's because T'ai Chi looks easy, but it's not. Dancers are bad, too—but with a certain amount of style. All that Robert's overextended stances, dramatic arm gestures, and elongated neck and facial expressions needed was a costume. There was no place to go but up. I noticed he took corrections well and really tried to integrate them into his form after I explained the reasons for the changes. (At the University, those dancers who had performance or even professional experience took corrections better than those without, since they had learned to deliver what a choreographer or director wanted very quickly or risk losing a part in a production.)

It turned out Robert had quite a bit of professional experience, studying dance and performing at the Westside School of Ballet in Santa Monica, California. He performed with the Kansas City Ballet for a decade then left for Minneapolis, where he performed on stages around the Twin Cities, including the

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Memorial for
Robert Skafte

Dec. 28, 5–8 p.m.

Center for
Performing Arts

3754 Pleasant Ave.

Minneapolis, MN
55409

Walker Art Center. He joined the Ballet of the Dolls dance company and starred in many of their shows, including Hello Dali, a campy send-up of the Spanish surrealist painter Salvador Dali.

I happened to see that show. As an artist myself, I was smitten with surrealism at a young age and with Dali in particular, studying his paintings, his writings, and his eccentric public persona in equal measure. I couldn't imagine who could play him.

Fortunately, Ballet of the Dolls founder Myron Johnson could. "Robert was rare because he was a great dancer who could also act," Johnson said in an interview. "He played Dali both vocally and physically. It was a ballet but it was also scripted. And he was mind-blowing in every performance, he just transcended into a world he created all on his own."

Eventually, Robert stopped performing and settled into the Loring Park neighborhood, where he both lived and worked for many years. He clerked at the Oak Grove Grocery store near his apartment, becoming a fixture in both the store and the community. He watered flowers along the sidewalk, oversaw a farmers' market, started a community garden, and talked and listened to neighbors. His presence

was deeply felt there. He came to our studio to learn another movement practice and, in the process, joined another community. He fit right in.

Robert eventually completed learning the entire T'ai Chi Ch'uan long form that we teach here at the studio. He came to a Solo Form refinements class that I was teaching on Wednesday, the 6th of December. We met with five other students in the small Community Room and began refining the movements at the end of the form. I noticed Robert's

hands and feet were moving in harmony, knees and elbows, shoulders and hips.

Through proper instruction and hard work, he could now do what T.T. Liang called the Solo Form Dance. It needed work, but it was a solid

form. Time and more practice would make it better.

But time is illusory—at best, it marks our milestones and measures our impermanence. When the clock stops in an unconventional way, it's difficult—maybe impossible—to make sense of it. The persistence of memory keeps a person close at hand in hearts and minds. Robert was part of our community, and we shared the Dance together—if only for a little while. We will miss him.

"Robert was rare . . . he was mind-blowing in every performance, he just transcended into a world he created all on his own."

