

## T'AI CHI IN THE MIST: WORLD T'AI CHI & QIGONG DAY – PATCHOGUE 2009

WTS Staff

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In the days preceding the event the conversations on the mat at Water Tiger School and in the various rooms where Laoshi Laurince McElroy teaches public T'ai Chi classes invariably turned to the brightly positive forecast for Saturday, April 25<sup>th</sup>. The promises of picture-perfect weather for the morning of the 2009 *World T'ai Chi & Qigong Day – Patchogue* at Shorefront Park, however, turned out to be empty. A thick, rolling fog descended upon the park; but, it was not allowed to diminish the celebration as six facilitators and over 80 people met and enjoyed a morning full of sharing, playing, and chatting.

For the first time in the history of the event in the village, the opening remarks and the formal remarks at the break were presented in two languages. As McElroy Laoshi spoke, he was flanked by two translators. Water Tiger School student Patricia Hsieh and community member – and son of a Water Tiger public class student – Jayson Siegel, served to make the event bilingual. Although some in the crowd questioned the need for the speeches to be given in both English and Spanish, most did understand Laoshi's intent to broaden the appeal of the event and present a more inclusive and truly "world" experience. In the words of Water Tiger student Michael Kandel:

I was especially pleased by the [Spanish] ... the addition of the translation was done comfortably, with grace, with humor, and seemed entirely appropriate and right ... after all so many people in the community speak and understand Spanish with more ease than English.

No policy-makers were in attendance this year, but the annual endeavors were not without recognition. Assemblywoman Patricia Eddington (3<sup>rd</sup> District) secured our third resolution from the NYS Assembly; Suffolk County Legislator Jack Eddington (7<sup>th</sup> District) generated our sixth proclamation from the county; and Mayor Paul Pontieri, Jr., signed our seventh proclamation from the Village of Patchogue.

The 80+ people who attended to experience the variety the arts have to offer were rewarded with six widely diverse workshops:

Judith Budd-Walsh, Harmonious Movement of Hauppauge, rejoined us to balance a two-year absence with two years of participation. She brought back a mixed-bag of play that included selections of Qigong from Nei Kung, Xi Jing Jing, Taoist breathing, and Bau Jing; and the Yang Long Form – first third.

After missing 2008, Bill Donnelly from Green Cloud Kung Fu of Holbrook, returned to Shorefront for the event. His workshop presented one T'ai Chi posture, Snake Creeps Down, from three different perspectives – Qigong, physical exercise, and martial application.

Returning for her second year, Nancy Fiano from Dojo of the Dancing Dragon in Lindenhurst added much to the morning's diversity with her presentation of the first set of Qigong Shibashi Exercises.

Spencer Gee, Spencer Gee Wellness Corporation of Old Westbury, was back for his eighth year with the event. As expected, Mr. Gee put the folks through their paces with his sweat-inducing T'ai Chi Workout.



**As McElroy Laoshi spoke, he was flanked by two translators, Patricia Hsieh (L) and Jayson Siegel (R) making the event bilingual for the first time in its nine-year history.**

Our one new facilitator for 2009 was Sharon Infante from Music, Movement and More in Mt. Sinai. Ms. Infante's workshop focused on a daily warming up Qigong exercise that incorporated the five elements of earth, metal, water, wood, and fire; and various aspects of T'ai Chi including opening and closing, walking, and forms.

Water Tiger's own Laoshi Laurince McElroy took a risk and put weapons in the hands of his charges to play variations on the theme of T'ai Chi Push Hands. His presentation included Moving Push Hands, Push Staff, and Push Sword.

For the third year, the facilitators came together for a group demonstration during the break at 10 AM. McElroy Laoshi introduced the moment, " ... we would like to take the opportunity to embrace and demonstrate the diversity of these arts we celebrate this morning. Six people in a separate unison, a varied similarity, a mixed harmony." Judith Budd-Walsh wove together her favorite moves from her lineage's Yang-style Long Form; Nancy Fiano was joined again this year with her friend and fellow instructor Mike Dalia to play their lineage's Orthodox Yang-style 24-posture form; Spencer Gee blended the movements of several Yang-Style postures with a detailed focus on Chan Si and Fa-jing; and McElroy Laoshi played Water Tiger's Yang-influenced Broadsword Form.

As the fog lifted in the last 90 minutes of the morning, many conversations and small groups of play unfolded in Shorefront. Members of Water Tiger School's studio and public class programs played some form and McElroy Laoshi demonstrated a section from the Yang-style staff form. The play on the ground was also rewarded with play in the sky. Osprey flew overhead and serenaded the gathering with mating calls. A student from Water Tiger's Sachem Public Library program shared her thoughts as the morning drew to a close:

A crystal clear blue sky with the sun shining – a blessing for all of us: the Osprey calling for his mate – a promise of new the stirrings of life; people in the beautiful flowing path of T'ai Chi – the joy of life; and the staff form – the struggles of life. The symphony of it all cannot help but move us.

Many of the conversations that have unfolded on the mat at the studio and in the community rooms of various public classes have been about details of the morning's diversity. The conversations have actually been just as diverse as the morning was. Some people were taken by the different energy that seems to come from the front of the group when the work is led by a woman. Some people found challenges in playing familiar postures in an unfamiliar way. Some people found themselves surprised by the simplicity, the complexity, and / or the ethnicity of the images the different facilitators utilized to help clarify the lesson. Some people enjoyed or struggled with the variety of teaching and presentation methodologies.

The breadth of the annual event's variety may actually broaden in 2010. As this year's morning drew close to noon, several of the facilitators began to discuss the idea of coordinating a two-day event next year. The thought under consideration is to continue with the main event on the scheduled day, April 24, 2010, at Shorefront Park in Patchogue and hold a sister event on the following day somewhere on the North Shore.

One shore or two, foggy or bathed in sunshine, *World T'ai Chi and Qigong Day – Patchogue* continues to present a wonderful opportunity to experience all these Chinese arts have to offer.



**The group facilitators' demonstration captured a separate unison, a varied similarity, a mixed harmony – (L to R); Spencer Gee, Mike Dalia, Sharon Infante, Judith Budd-Walsh, and Nancy Fiano. McElroy Laoshi is not pictured.**

