

CELEBRATION DELAYED BUT NOT DIMINISHED: WORLD T'AI CHI & QIGONG DAY – PATCHOGUE 2014

WTS Staff

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2004 was the first year that the international event was scheduled for the last Saturday in April. Previous to that year, it was held on the Saturday closest to the United Nations' World Health Day, which is on April 7th. The weather did not cooperate with us on Long Island for the first two years after the change and we still found ourselves in what we called at the time our "bad weather location" — St. Francis Parish Hall on South Ocean. Although there have been years with a stiff wind coming in off the bay and other years with fog so thick you couldn't see the band shell from Smith Street, we've been outdoors every year since 2006 and have not had to rely on the rain dates that replaced the indoor fallback in 2007. However, this year became an exception. The rain on the morning of April 26th was just too much and we had to move the event to May 3rd.

"It was hard for me to postpone the event," event coordinator Laoshi Laurince McElroy admits. "It's just not something I like to do, but it was the right decision." At least one facilitator didn't really agree with him. Elan Abneri, Zhang Style Tai Chi Chuan, remained in Shorefront Park and played in the rain. He later reported that someone else joined him in spite of the weather:

So I invited her to do the third round of my form with me. I then went through teaching her the first moves of the form in depth. I also spent some time working with her on what I was going to do for my group. I must say it was actually quite a good day considering the rain.

Delaying for a week did have its costs.

There were a little over 100 participants last year and the hope was to break our attendance record of 110 this year, but the headcount was only 65 on the 3rd. Regardless of the lighter number, many participants and facilitators expressed their surprise at how well-attended the delayed celebration was. We were also to be joined for a second year by Town of Brookhaven Supervisor Edward P. Romaine, but he was not able to make the rain date event to present our second letter-of-support from him and our second proclamation from the town. Robert Calarco, Suffolk County Legislature (7th District) was another dignitary who couldn't fit the reschedule on his calendar, but he did send his associate, Karen Johnson, to present his supporting proclamation. Bill Hilton, Village of Patchogue Trustee and Commissioner of Parks and Recreation, was able to make the rain date and presented our twelfth proclamation from the village. We were also pleased to receive a letter-of-support from US Senator Kirsten E. Gillibrand, as well as a letter-of-support and a proclamation from NYS Senator Lee M. Zeldin (3rd District), and a NYS Assembly resolution through Assemblyman Andrew R. Garbarino (7th District). Additionally, participants honored us with \$142 in donations. This was less than last year's top amount, but a few dollars more than the previous record.

McElroy Laoshi tells us his biggest fear with the rain delay, though, was that breaking the facilitator record would fall through the cracks. "We've never had more than eight facilitators since we founded the Patchogue event in 2001," he says. "I was ecstatic to see that number grow this year to 11 facilitators representing 10 different programs for the 26th. I didn't want to see that go away." It did, but not to the extent he feared. Three facilitators from two programs had to beg off the rain date event and one was added. Longtime participants Bob and Jean Klein, Long Island School of T'ai-Chi-Ch'uan, and newcomer Joseph Panico of West Babylon had other commitments; and, Teresa White, Long Island T'ai Chi & Internal Arts, joined our ranks for the first time.

The list for the morning of the 3rd included:

Elan, a senior student of Sifu Tyrone "Wei" Wicksman at Zhang Style Tai Chi Chuan (Centereach), returned from his soaking the previous week to mark his fourth year at the front. His workshop this year was an in-depth exploration of hip alignment with attention on the rear leg.

Marking 11 years since she first joined our event, Judith Budd-Walsh, Harmonious Movement (Port Jefferson Station), presented a mixed-bag of play for her workshop. It included healing qigong, meridian therapy, and an abbreviated version of her lineage's Yang-style Long Form.



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This year also marks 11 years since Bill Donnelly, Green Cloud Kung Fu (Patchogue), first joined us. Continuing his desire to present something different for each of the seven years he's been able to join us as a facilitator, Bill presented Taoist Yoga during his workshop.

Spencer Gee, Spencer Gee Wellness Corporation (Old Westbury), hasn't missed a year since he first stepped to the front for our event in 2002. For his annual T'ai Chi Workout, Spencer had folks working with eight-inch rubber balls in their hands and, for some, with at least one foot on a skateboard!

Returning for his second year, Chris Jurak, Mountain Stream T'ai Chi and Qigong (Brightwaters), offered participants an introduction to the Gam Gong Lin Gong (Diamond Body Practice), the foundational Qigong form of the Tibetan Lama Pai tradition.

It was nice to see Sharon Infante, Music Movement and More (Mount Sinai), this year. She had to cancel her participation last year due to a serious illness. Her time at the front on the 3rd presented the 18 forms of Shibashi.

McElroy Laoshi is another instructor who has always sought to bring something different each year to the event. This year it was time for something completely different and he led a leg and glute workout that used nothing more than the human body and gravity. He called the workout "Setting the Foundation: Lower Body Blaster".

A student of Water Tiger, James Brennan, put McElroy Laoshi in touch with one of our new faces for 2014. A short email thread ended in a commitment from Ed Turney, Shaolin Kung Fu Studios (Rocky Point), only a month prior to this year's event. Ed presented an outlook on QingChengShan Daoist alchemical methods, unification of Kan and Li (water & fire), with excerpts from some of the Chinese classics.

It could be argued that Laoshi Joel Valerio is another facilitator from Water Tiger since he attends classes at the studio, but Valerio Laoshi is a teacher in his own right. He currently teaches privately using his home in Ozone Park as his base of operations — as he used his home in Buffalo while he lived there (2011-2012). For his first time at the front for our event, he presented a workshop he called "Weaving through The Standing Eight Pieces of Brocade".

As noted above, Teresa White, Long Island Tai Chi and Internal Arts (Babylon), was a late entry. She's also a new face at the front for our event. She was in New York City for the Central Park event on the 26th since the weather was fine to our west. We were happy to add her name to the roster and her workshop, "Compression and Expansion in Tai Chi – Pump up Your Practice", to our schedule.

With 10 different facilitators presenting 10 very different workshops, it was clear as the morning unfolded that there is great variety in the Chinese arts. When McElroy Laoshi introduced the facilitators' demonstration, he offered his explanation of how there can be so many differences when people are doing, essentially, the same thing: "It's been said that T'ai Chi is a house with many doors. Each of our facilitators has entered the House of T'ai Chi through a different door."

Although not all the morning's facilitators participated in what has become a highlight of the event since it was introduced in 2006, the facilitators' demonstration had to open up over more space this year. It was yet another opportunity to show the breadth of the arts. There was Yang, Zhang, Northern Wu, Wu Dang, and Mountain Stream Lightning style open-hand forms. There was Jian, Dao, and Qiang weapon forms. There was flow. There was stomping. There was jabbing. There was slicing.

If, as they say, variety is the spice of life, the rain date unfolding of the 2014 World T'ai Chi & Qigong Day — Patchogue was without a doubt richly flavorful.



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