

## FROM WET TO WONDERFUL: 2023 WORLD T'AI CHI & QIGONG DAY

Water Tiger School Staff  
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While there was a brief respite from rain being in the extended forecast for April 29<sup>th</sup> at a week out, it seemed obvious we'd have to shift to our rain date the next week. "It was so clear it would be a washout," explains event coordinator Laoshi Laurince McElroy, "I called it the afternoon before — which I've never done before." As you probably know he's always withheld such a decision until the morning of the event and his arrival in the event space.

The initial extended forecast for May 6<sup>th</sup>, two weeks out, called for mid-60s and partly cloudy skies. However, by the time McElroy Laoshi called the 29<sup>th</sup>, rain and cooler temperatures were in the forecast for our rain date as well. It wasn't until just a few days before the 6<sup>th</sup> that things began to look better. By the time McElroy Laoshi ushered the event underway that morning, the sky was crystalline blue with nary a cloud in sight and the sun was shining bright and warm.

We're not sure if it was the postponement or just a continuation of a pandemic-induced slow return to normal, but attendance remained light again this year. The headcount was 48 in 2022 and it was 49 on the 6<sup>th</sup>. We were also within \$3.00 of last year's donation figure of \$348 at a healthy \$345 this year.

Additionally, the delay led to the loss of three of our initially booked 11 facilitators. Those that had conflicts and withdrew their participation were Bob and Jean Klein of Long Island School of T'ai-Chi-Chuan in Sound Beach and Bill Donnelly of Green Cloud Kung Fu. Regardless, we still had eight facilitators, representing as many programs, and leading a total of 11 workshops through the morning's two sessions this year.

Once again, we had new face with us, Leslie Martin of Patchogue. Leslie found us through our listing on the international event's website and reached out to McElroy Laoshi via email. Leslie has an extensive background in Qigong and other traditional healing arts. She's been a Licensed Massage Therapist since 1984, a Certified Amma Therapist<sup>®</sup> since 1988, and a practitioner of Taoist Qigong since 1999. She was an Associate Professor of Amma Therapy, European Massage, and wholistic lifestyle and dietary practices at New York College of Health Professions for 18 years. This was also only the second time, Maria Campanella of Miller Place, who usually assists Spencer Gee, led her own workshop; she also served as Spencer's replacement in 2018 when he had a scheduling conflict arise after he'd already accepted his invitation.

As has become the tradition, McElroy Laoshi introduced the morning's facilitators during the break by talking about the power of diversity in the arts. This year, he told a favorite Water Tiger joke: How many T'ai Chi players does it take to screw in a light bulb? One — with everyone else standing around saying their way is better. What he said next suggested our eight instructors would, instead, contemplate the difference, seek to understand it, determine why it works for that player, and why their way works for them.

Elan Abneri returned this year to represent Sifu Tyrone "Wei" Wicksman, Silent Mind Tai Chi (Lake Grove). His "Basics of the Zhang Style Form" was his ninth workshop for our annual event. His contribution to the group facilitator demonstration was the Zhang Style Form.

Judith Budd-Walsh, Harmonious Movement (Port Jefferson Station) returned for her 16<sup>th</sup> time this year. Her workshop on the 6<sup>th</sup> was *Seasonal Healing Qigong and T'ai Chi Flow*. For her part in the demonstration, she chose her favorite highlights from her lineage's approach to the Yang-Style Long Form.

For her first event as an "official" facilitator, Maria Campanella altered her planned workshop content for both sessions to, "Flow of Four Birds and Glow of the Tigers in the Yang Long Form". The Long Form was also her choice for the facilitators' demo.



**It was obvious the day before that the 29<sup>th</sup> would be a washout.**

*Sarayut Thaneerat / Getty Images*

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<sup>®</sup> *Amma* is a Japanese word that means "push-pull" and *Amma Therapy* is an Asian bodywork approach developed in the time of the Yellow Emperor in China, five thousand years ago.

Returning for 18<sup>th</sup> time, Spencer Gee, the Spencer Gee Wellness Corporation (Roslyn Heights), once again led his ever-popular “T’ai Chi Workout” during both sessions as the morning unfolded. He described his participation in the group demo as “a freestyle Yang Flow-Form ... emphasis[ing] silk-reeling movement and upright body alignment”.

Leslie Martin (Patchogue) was yet another facilitator that led her workshop for both sessions. It combined “Discover LaoGong”, “Harmonizing the 5 Elements”, and “Harmonizing Heart Qi”. Leslie chose to join the audience during the group demonstration.

McElroy Laoshi is the only facilitator with more events on his record than Spencer and has tallied 23 events on Long Island — including two remote events in 2020 and 2021, plus Water Tiger’s first event in Des Moines, Iowa, a year before our inaugural 2001 event in Patchogue on Long Island. His workshop this year was “Jian 101”, aka Chinese straight sword basics. For the second year in a row, McElroy Laoshi’s demo was Water Tiger’s Yang-Influenced, Simplified 32-Posture T’ai Chi Straight Sword Form while wielding *The Blade of the Water Tiger*.

Returning for his fifth event, after a four-year absence, Joseph Panico (West Babylon) focused his workshop on his lineage’s approach to the Yang-Style 24-Posture Form. Joseph played his lineage’s approach to the Combined 42 Form.

Adding the eighth year to his facilitation record for our annual event, Valerio Laoshi (Staten Island) returned to lead his workshop on the *Standing Eight Pieces of Brocade*. His contribution to the group demo was our lineage’s approach to the 24-Posture Form.

Town of Brookhaven Supervisor Edward P. Romaine and, for the first time ever, his wife, Diane, were there for the 10A break and to present the town’s annual proclamation to McElroy Laoshi. Mr. Romaine took office following a special election in November 2012. Since his election, he’s secured a proclamation from the town for us for every year — excluding the remote years of 2020 and 2021. For many of those years, he’s also issued a letter-of-support from his office. Part of his address this year included a nod to how his current term is his last as supervisor; but, he still promised to attend next year’s event — regardless of holding a different office or finding himself in retirement.

Aside from the proclamation from the town, we also received state and additional town recognition. From Senator Mario R. Mattera, 2<sup>nd</sup> District, we received our third Certificate of Recognition issued by a NYS senator. Town of Brookhaven Councilwoman Jane Bonner, 2<sup>nd</sup> District, sent us her third letter-of-support since the event moved to her district in 2018.

There were plenty of positive comments from the participants as the morning unfolded — including about the quality of the workshops, the beauty of both the day and the park, and the smooth and organized unfolding of the event. These sentiments have also woven their way through the feedback we’ve received from our facilitators with many of them including something along the lines of “as always”.

It’s hard to believe that this year marks the 24<sup>th</sup> time Water Tiger has served as host and McElroy Laoshi has served as coordinator for a *World Tai Chi & Qigong Day* event. As mentioned above, the first was in Des Moines, Iowa, for the international event’s second year and, a year later, the hosting and coordination shifted to Patchogue’s Shorefront Park — where the event remained for 17 years. Following the challenges created by the village in 2017, the third move brought us to Diamond in the Pines, where things will be for year 25.



**As it is every year, diversity was on display during the event’s group facilitator demo at the morning’s break. Pictured: Judith Budd-Walsh (L), Joseph Panico (C), and Spencer Gee (R).**

