STUDENT PROFILE: PAUL ADAGO, JR.

By WTS Staff
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Retired, but recently returned to part-time employment, Paul Adago, Jr., has been at Water Tiger School since September 2002. After a career as a mental health aide, the 57-year-old Holtsville resident is working in an administrative support position for the academic counseling office on the Selden campus of Suffolk County Community College. Paul is the kwoon's most senior student or *Si-hing* (p. SEE-heeng) and attends class twice a week.

When asked how he came to be interested in T'ai Chi, Paul tells us, "When I retired two and a half years ago I was in search of a philosophy – a way of life – that would help me become centered and more in touch with the world around me." It just happened to be at this time he saw Sachem Public Library in Holbrook was offering a series of daytime T'ai Chi classes. He acknowledges that he had previously heard of T'ai Chi and had always planned on exploring whether or not it held anything for him. He joined the public class, facilitated by Laoshi, in July of 2002. The class was an eight-week session with a *Cloud Hands & Horse's Mane* curriculum. Paul describes the first meeting, "From the moment I watched Laoshi demonstrate the Long Form I was hooked."

Paul holds a First Degree Registered Black Belt in Shotokan Karate.

Paul admits that he has always had an interest in Eastern philosophy. He's practiced Transcendental Meditation, Hatha Yoga, and Shotokan Karate. He actually holds a First Degree Registered Black Belt in Shotokan, an Okinawan style of Karate founded by Gichin Funakoshi. Funakoshi Shihan is credited with introducing Okinawan Karate to Mainland Japan in 1916. When it comes to the variety of his experience Paul says, "To me T'ai Chi embodies all of the best attributes of meditation, Yoga, and Karate."

As part of his study, Paul currently assists Laoshi on Tuesday nights at Sachem Public Library. It is part of the SPL "studio" series, which is a studio-style class but in a public environment. *Grasp Sparrow's Tail to the Four Cardinal Directions* serves as the foundation for the class. In this venue, Paul is known as *Si-Suk*, or Instructor's Junior (p. SEE-sook). He was actually a little surprised one night recently when Laoshi made a point of emphasizing Paul's position to the students. "The library patrons were a little hesitant in following Paul's lead," Laoshi recalls. "And I felt it necessary to remind them that when he speaks, he speaks for me."

Paul has completed his introductory work in the kwoon on *Cloud Hands & Horse's Mane*, *Grasp Sparrow's Tail*, *Dragon Strikes to the Four Diagonals*, and *13 Postures*. As we go to press, he is five movements and one posture away from completing the *Water Tiger School 24-Posture Form*. He tells us that his long-term goal is to teach T'ai Chi full-time. With his work at SPL, he appears to be well on his way. Paul will also be working with fellow *Si-Hing* Matt Kintzel in facilitating classes at the kwoon during the holiday season in December for the short time that Laoshi will be on vacation.

Laoshi's appearance on Cablevision's Public Access show *Men's Forum* at the end of last year was Paul's idea. Gary Costanza, the program's producer and host, is his friend and he has made several guest appearances on the show, which addresses myriad issues relating to the lives of men. As to how T'ai Chi was brought to the show, Paul says, "I initially ran the idea of doing a show on T'ai Chi with Gary because of his apparent interest in the art." An interest that may have been cultivated when Paul asked Mr. Costanza to video his practice, "I felt that seeing myself doing the various forms would help in the learning process." Paul tells us that he was looking for a way to let people know that T'ai Chi was about more than the "dance-like" movements that most equate with the art. "The martial side of the art is something that many do not seem to grasp," Paul explains. He was quite pleased with the result. Although there hasn't been much feedback regarding the show from the public at large, students in the kwoon and students in the WTS public classes have told us that they really like what they saw. Laoshi is quick to add, "I really wish one of my students would have told me that I had a little hair-trauma the night Mr. Costanza was in the studio taping."

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As to life outside the studio, Paul truly understands the importance of the election process in the United States and spends his election days working at the polling place. Of the recent election he says that it was one of the smoothest presidential elections he can remember. "It was busy from the morning through the evening," he tells us. "But it was never frantic." He was surprised, given what had been predicted with high turnout, that he was at home by 10:30 PM on November 2nd.

Paul credits his work in T'ai Chi with an overall improvement in his overall health. He's dropped 18 pounds, reduced his blood pressure by 25 points, and tells us that the things in life that can cause stress may still exist, but the stress does not. Paul adds a final note, "And I feel more connected to the world around me."

Paul (R) & Laoshi playing GST4CD at Patchogue's *Alive After Five* in July.

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