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Extending Into The Community: 4th Annual Conference Unites Extension Affiliates

Vaughn Brandt

The Fourth International Conference of Aiki Extensions (AE) took place October 4-6 at the University of Chicago in Chicago, IL. As part of AE's steady growth as an organization, its members converged again to present their work, exchange ideas, and collaboratively center themselves as "Extenders of Aiki."

This year's conference was attended by a diverse and experienced group of aikido instructors and professionals who apply the principles of aikido in various settings off the mat. The three-day conference was action-packed and filled with Aiki Extensions demonstrations, presentations, discussions, aikido practice, and celebration. Participants came to Chicago from both coasts of the U.S. and from as far as Sao Paulo, Brazil.

On the first day, the programming was dedicated to the Greater Chicago Youth Outreach Project (GCAYOP). During the first half of the day, affiliates Michael Bailey, Scott Evans and James Landry brought in three groups of young people and demonstrated their unique programs for the conference participants. The programs each used aikido movements and philosophies for youth outreach, primarily with the goals of teaching skills for centering and conflict resolution. The youth participants' responses were compelling for the power of this type of work. The "in vivo" (or "in progress") style of the demonstrations was also exciting in that it allowed the conference participants to observe Aiki Extensions work in progress.



Scott Evans gave a great demonstration of the "Aikido Learning Therapeutic Experience Resource (ALTER)" program with adolescent students from a local psychiatric hospital. The students were experiencing the program for the first time and learned the basics of meditation, communicating from the heart in a Native American style Council, and then some basic conflict resolution skills coupled with aikido movements. After the demonstrations and a break, four other youth outreach projects were presented, along with a discussion of the morning's demonstrations.

The second day began with three programs on Law Enforcement and Public Security, then three programs on extension work in the Healing Arts cluster, and concluded with an open forum on ideas for teaching aikido, its applications, and the nature of connections. In each field the value of aikido skills and principles is considerable, as evidenced by the practitioners and instructors who presented their work.

In the first programs of the second day, Keith Moore spoke along with law enforcement officers Michael Bailey and Matthew Little about their experiences teaching aikido principles to other officers. They confirmed both the initial skepticism and later recognition that one might expect presenting to an active duty professional. Law Enforcement Officers need real skills that can be acquired quickly and applied in very adverse situations, but can benefit greatly from specialized aikido training. These two exceptional Officers discussed their experiences training aikido principles and techniques to other officers both on an individual basis and in training groups. Their experience was that aikido has an immense amount to offer the law enforcement community when presented appropriately to their needs, and they discussed how to give them tools they can use to help keep the peace.

The Healing Arts presentations then focused on Dealing with Abuse. One demonstration described the value of aikido approaches to conflicts in inpatient mental health institutes. In another, Hugh Young presented a fabulous model of conflict resolution and ways of establishing clear and compassionate boundaries with abusive persons. Another presentation described a Forest Dojo that was set up to teach about aikido and conflict resolution at a National Rainbow Gathering that ended up mediating between and teaching peacemaking skills to some troubled and unhappy campers. Finally, Paul Linden described some of his seminal work helping victims of sexual abuse. Paul also demonstrated some of the physiological exercises and therapeutic adjustments he uses to help clients regain a strong center and the ability to extend them into the world with confidence.



The second day concluded with a Conference Dinner and celebration at the home of the founder, Don Levine. The gathering provided a nice chance to sit down together and enjoy good food and good cheer. It was also very nice to bring home the growing organization's energy to city and home of its beginnings. One of the most striking qualities at dinner was the open and ecumenical fellowship, and subsequent inter-organizational recollection of the history of aikido in America.

The third day, Sunday, consisted of a series of presentations and discussions about the relationships between aikido and spirituality. Wendy Palmer spoke about the value of meditation and the connections between centering on and off the mat. She also led a discussion on the relationship between giving oneself as a spiritual being and the important practice of ukemi. Rick Stickles also contributed to this theme by discussing the connections he has found with Buddhism and breathing meditations.

David Lukoff and Beth Tabakin also led a "100 tenkans" exercise and then discussion on the correlation between the movements of aikido and spirituality. Participants shared moments they have felt a spiritual connection on the mat and considered ways to encourage and cultivate those experiences off the mat, both in themselves and also possibly with others.



The final day concluded with a business meeting to discuss the current and future directions of AE. Affiliates who were present for the meeting agreed on an official switch to a membership organization. Expanding the scale and quality of the organizational publications, investigating opportunities for research on AE projects, and ways to continue supporting and empowering one another's activities were discussed. The continued importance of grounding all AE work in quality training on that mat was also reinforced. Overall, interest and activity in the organization is greater than ever and we are looked at the next best steps to build upon that success.

Aiki Erweiterung

The 2nd Augsburg (Germany) AE Conference

Paul Linden

I was fortunate to attend two AE conferences this year: one in Chicago (AEC4) and another the following weekend in Augsburg, Germany. The German conference was the second *Aiki Erweiterung* conference organized by Peter Schettgen, an attendee of previous American AE conferences.

What struck me about the Augsburg conference was how much it felt like home. Despite the new setting, the topics were familiar, the round robin Aikido practice was familiar, and more than anything else the people were familiar. The twenty-five participants in the Augsburg AE conference were the same sort of creative, friendly, and questing people that attended American AE conferences. They represented various Aikido styles and teachers, with diverse areas of focus and concern, yet all practicing together harmoniously with a sense of respectful sharing.

Over the course of two days, there were five presentations, along with the round robin practice. The first day of the conference became with my own presentation- "Aikido Roots and Branches: Body Awareness Training Methods and Their Applications in Daily Life." I showed how my body work derives primarily from Aikido and how it works with posture, breath, movement and intentionality to help people create a mind-body state of awareness, power, and love. This body process can then be applied to music, pregnancy, garden work, sexual abuse recovery, attention deficit disorder, conflict resolution, and Aikido teaching itself.

The second presentation was titled “Violence Prevention in Children and Youth, on the Basis of Far Eastern Martial Arts”, delivered by Stephan Richter and Ernst Friedrich (both aikidoka) and Michael Pest (a Tae Kwon Do teacher). Their work combines elements of the two martial arts with group dynamics learning. Martial arts training is used as a path for self-development, which is then applied to reduce the elements which cause violence.

The second day began with Ute Schwarzmayer and “Aikido as Relationship, or the Concept of Heartful Aggression.” In Ute’s understanding, Aikido provides a constructive relationship with aggression that teaches how to approach another person with strength yet harmony. The destructive elements of strength are reined in by compassion. In particular, in her work with women, this leads to the ability to have clearer boundaries and clearer statements of needs.

The fourth presentation was by Bertram Wohak, titled “Deconditioning the Protection Reflex: Bokken Work as Treatment Method in Body and Breath Therapy.” Beginning with the use of body therapy methods for the improvement of body perception, Bertram demonstrated how traumatized clients can overcome the fear reflex (compression and restriction of the breath and posture) through training in Aikido sword work. By learning to get off the line of the attack while consciously controlling posture and breathing, clients can reduce fear and develop more self-confidence.

The final presentation was by Peter Schettgen. Under the title “Foe or Friend: How Reality Constructs Shape our Interaction with Conflict”, Peter presented the work he does in personnel trainings within business settings. He focused on the element of “reframing” to demonstrate how perspective influences how one deals with conflict: as long as you perceive an aggressor as an enemy, you are likely to be limited to reflex actions such as fight, flight or freezing. However, if you can look at the aggressor as a friend, the door is open to harmonious problem-solving.



Peter reframing a weighty problem.



The group ranking the significance of various violations.

The conference ended with an interesting brainstorming session. Peter had each person take cards and write down a key word describing for them the meaning and application of Aiki extension work. He then had the cards pinned to a bulletin board to see what concept clusters would naturally emerged. The results were three core areas identified by the participants- management and personal development, psychotherapy, and bodywork and health. Out of that, three work groups emerged to focus on those applications.

Overall, the conference was very interesting and enjoyable. I wonder how long it will be before there are Aiki Extensions regional conferences all over the world. I am sure O Sensei would be pleased.



Update on the Marine Martial Art Project

Richard Strozzi Heckler, Ph.D.

Since its inception over two years ago, the Marine Martial Art is finding firm ground in the United States Marine Corps (USMC). We will soon break ground for a new facility at The Basic School (TBS) that will house a dojo, classrooms, weight room, showers, and offices for the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program (MCMAP). This is a big move in its institutionalization in the Corps.

The second Director of the program has been named. Aside from being a committed and accomplished martial artist, he deeply understands the importance of emphasizing character and moral values, and will represent the program well.

Early this summer, Commandant James Jones, four star General and the highest ranking member of the Marine Corp, held the first World Wide Commandants' Conference at the Marine Corps Headquarters in Washington D.C. Representing USMC from over thirty-two countries, these Commandants attended a demonstration of the Marine Martial Art as part of their briefing. They were all duly impressed by the discipline, rigor, and spirit shown. At the garden party and evening parade I had many animated conversations with these leaders about this new art.

Reports continue to arrive across my desk about how incidents of drunkenness, brawling, drug abuse, and domestic violence have gone down and morale has risen in cases where Marines have been engaged in regular practice of the art. On deployment, small and large detachments are practicing regularly and report that it plays a fundamental part in keeping their spirits up in harsh and dangerous conditions.

The third and revised edition of *In Search of The Warrior Spirit* will be coming out by early next year with additions outlining the history of Marine Martial Art and what it is accomplishing.

On another note I was asked to be on the Advisory Board of the Asia-Pacific Initiative for the American Council on Foreign Affairs. This represents another opportunity to learn and introduce Aiki concepts on an international scale.

See you on the mat



DO AIKIDOKA DREAM OF ECLECTIC SCHOOLS?

Crystal Farm Schools will take the next step in integrating aikido and education

Tom and Fran Osborn

As those who attended AEC4 know, plans for Crystal Farm School are moving ahead. Crystal Farm will be a residential college-preparatory high school in which the organizational structure, curriculum, and plan of residential life will be based on the principles of Aikido. We are looking at a potential start date of September 2003. At this stage, Crystal Farm School is now incorporated and has gained non-profit status. Potential sites have been located and the interim Board of Directors includes educators, aikidoka, an accountant and a sensei (Rokudan in Aikido and Godan in Iaido).

The school's most pressing need is for financial help. We are looking for personal contributions, as well as assistance in locating potential funding, whether from foundation, corporate, or individual sources. As more of us are finding ways to take Aikido "off the mat", an increasing number of people working with youth, human services, healing arts, and the private sector are being exposed to the power of Aikido as an approach to life. It is our hope that as various corporations, agencies and individuals have been exposed to Aikido, they might also be interested in supporting a school for young people versed in both the practice of Aikido and how it is applied in real-life situations.

The School is also looking for any written material on the application of Aikido in educational environments, especially at the secondary level. In particular, examples of its inculcation into standard subjects such as history, social studies, math, literature, or science. We are also looking for any research or anecdotal information on the impact which the kinesthetics- the physical practice- may have on young peoples' approach problem-solving, group dynamics, social interactions, and academics. Information on these subjects, especially in hardcopy form, would be greatly appreciated.

The school also needs students. If you are a parent, student, or know young people who you think would thrive in a school like Crystal Farm, please contact us.

If you would like more information about Crystal Farm School please contact Tom Osborn and Frances Welson at 1421 Northampton Street, Holyoke, MA 01040, telephone 413-532-9034, fax 413-532-0241, e-mail tdosoborn@attbi.com. For those interested in supporting Crystal Farm School, please note that all contributions are tax-deductible.

AIKI EXTENSIONS NEWSLETTER

Editor: Scott B. Evans

Subscription and membership

Newsletters are sent free of charge to all AE members and associate members. They are sent to subscribers on payment of costs.

To become a **member**, complete the questionnaire at < www.aiki-extensions.org/about_ae/connecting.php> and hit Submit Text.

To be a **non-member subscriber**, send an e-mail to dwight@aiki-extensions.org.

A. Regular Member.

Qualifications: Nikyu rank or above. Engagement in some activity congruent with Aiki Extensions objectives.

Benefits: Listing in Directory, copy of Directory, listing on website, AE-related links listed on website, automatic registration on AE-News listserv, invitation to join AE-Chat listserv, communications with clusters, access to AE forums, newsletters, other publications, eligibility for AE grants, priority seating at AE conferences.

Dues: \$30 per year, payable by March 1.

B. Associate Member

Qualifications: Interest in the work of Aiki Extensions.

Benefits: Copy of Directory, automatic registration on AE-News listserv, invitation to join AE-Chat listserv, access to AE forums, newsletters, other publications.

Dues: \$20 per year, payable by March 1.

C. Non-Member Subscriber

Anyone may view the website, subscribe from there to the AE listserv, and receive AE publications on payment of costs.

AE Listserves

AE-News is the official listserv for announcements about AE activities. All members and associates are registered. Posting to AE-News requires administrative approval.

AE-Chat is the organization's listserv for discussion and individual postings. Anyone can subscribe, post after subscription, and unsubscribe. To subscribe, write list-admin@aiki-extensions.org, with *subscribe ae-chat* in the body of the text. A message sent to ae-chat@aiki-extensions.org reaches all subscribers. To unsubscribe, use the same address, saying *unsubscribe ae-chat*. For inquiries, write list-admin@aiki-extensions.org.

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