

NEIGHBORS IN THE NEWS

Man honored for 20 years of teaching aikido

By **MIKE BRAXTON**
Special to the Potomac News

Gerard Roy introduced aikido to Prince William County residents more than 20 years ago and continues to teach succeeding generations of martial arts students at the Dale City Recreation Center.

Roy began by teaching an aikido seminar at the recreation center's karate summer camp where he announced that he was starting an aikido club. The dojo or practice hall would be located at the center.

Robert Rodriguez, who had practiced martial arts for 26 years, attended that first seminar and recalls his amazement at how a man as large as Roy could move so gracefully and perform forward and backward rolls while returning with such ease to the standing position.

Rodriguez judges a martial art by the quality and character of the instructor and the art itself. Both of these, he says, he discovered at that seminar two decades ago.

Roy, assisted by several aikido students from another dojo, demonstrated how to control an aggressor with a slight twist of the arm and push him away as though he were a blade of grass. Aikido can be brutal and harsh, but Roy explained it was designed to strengthen minds and bodies through reasoning and understanding.

During the first year or so there was some student crossover from the other martial arts at the center, Roy and Rodriguez said. Word of mouth and advertising helped to draw additional students. The crossover students served as mentors to the new students.

Aikido was not a well-known martial art at the time, and even today, is not as popular as karate, tae kwon do or judo. Roy began to change that perspective. About this time, actor Steven Segal introduced aikido to the general public with the film "Above the Law." The class size was, at times, sparse, but Roy persevered and developed a core group of students.

Called sensei (teacher) by the students, Roy's teaching centered on building strength of character, mind, and body all



Submitted photo

Sensei Jerry Roy, left, received a gift from sensei Gordon Sakamoto to commemorate Roy's 20 years teaching aikido in Dale City. Sakamoto taught Roy the aikido martial art.

the while emphasizing fellowship within the dojo.

In aikido there are no opponents, just partners working together to learn this martial art. Roy taught the students how to fall without getting hurt and, without the need of strength, how to dispense an aggressor with a throw or a lock. The techniques of aikido are used to mediate a situation rather than have the situation escalate into conflict.

For most of the past 20 years, Roy served as the sole instructor. Class size would average around 12 students, occasionally reaching as many as 20 students.

Roy sponsored seminars and invited guest instructors to teach. Eventually he developed certain students who attained the shodan level, which is the first degree black belt. These students have become instructors and instructors from other dojos have joined the club.

Roy remains the chief instructor. Aikido is the most sophisticated, yet subtle form of self-defense in all of the

martial arts.

At the highest level, it develops perfect harmony between mind and body. Strength is not a requirement and not a factor in accomplishing the aikido techniques. Thus size does not matter.

In many ways aikido is like learning to move as in dancing with the additional requirement of learning to tumble without injuring oneself.

The word aikido is a conjunction of three Japanese characters or kanji. These three kanji, ai-ki-do means, "the way of harmonizing with the spirit of the universe".

Although aikido is primarily a self-defense art, it takes as the basis of its philosophy the idea of being in harmony with your opponent rather than being in conflict with him. This is why aikido is sometimes called the art of non-resistance or the non-fighting martial art.

Roy teaches classes at the recreation center on Saturdays from 8 to 9:30 a.m. and Sundays from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m.

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