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Peaceful Warrior Corey Guilbault and the Art of Aikido

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A low-angle photograph of two men in white Aikido gi practicing a technique in a wooden dojo. The man on the left is in a dynamic pose, looking upwards with a focused expression. The man on the right is also looking upwards, with his hands positioned to assist or guide the first man's movement. The background consists of dark wooden beams and panels, creating a sense of depth and tradition. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the textures of the gi and the wood.

Capturing
the Art of the
Peaceful Warrior
Through
Aikido



Corey Guilbault of Aikido of Norwalk

The Samurai lived and died by the code of conduct known as *Bushido*, which included honor, simplicity, cleanliness, politeness, courage, loyalty, honesty, mercy, self-discipline and harmony. Above all, the Samurai's life was one of service. Watching Corey Guilbault, founder of Aikido of Norwalk, one gets the sense that he is living by that same code. Guilbault, Aikido *Yondan* (4th rank) and *Shidojin* (instructor), presides over his cavernous, clean, and simple loft-like studio, its lineage of Aikido teachers prominently displayed on the walls, with a quiet pride and a deep sense of honor and respect for this ancestry. He's also a genuinely warm and friendly guy whose affable confidence makes the idea of checking out Aikido appealing for anyone interested in, but perhaps a little intimidated by the martial arts.

"I believe Aikido will appeal to people looking for a different take on martial arts," he said in a recent interview with *The Beat*. "Aikido is more than a workout or self-defense. There's a depth to it that keeps revealing itself over time. Aikido is a means of relating to the world."

Set apart from more well-known forms of martial arts, at the heart of Aikido teachings is compassion for all living things, including one's enemies. Founder Morihei Ueshiba, born in 1883, had been immersed in the combative martial arts until he experienced a spiritual awakening under the guidance of one of his teachers, which led to the practice he termed as Aikido. The Japanese characters for Ai-Ki-Do are translated as: *AI* - harmony; *KI* - energy, spirit, essence, or life force; and *DO* - the way of. Thus, Aikido is "the way of harmony with energy" or "art of peace."

A Norwalk dojo and its affable sensei offer instruction in this lesser known martial art.

By Jon Cuizon



Photos by Jim Nichols



The practice of Aikido involves the neutralizing and controlling of an attacker rather than the overpowering of him; it ultimately seeks harmony over violence. As with similar non-striking martial arts, when an attacker directs a powerful force at the Aikido practitioner, that same energy is redirected right back at the attacker. The goal is to shift the energy from violence to neutrality, out of compassion, with no intent to harm the attacker. This transformation of energy is not about speed and strength but rather about timing, awareness, balance and understanding the nature of body and mind. The discipline of the practice provides the Aikido student with the means to integrate the body and mind to cope with combative encounters in a nonviolent manner. The evolved practitioner coordinates movements and strategies using various striking, throwing, pinning and joint-locking techniques toward that end.

Guilbault began his relationship with Aikido in 1989 while he was a student at Syracuse University. After graduating he went to Chicago and enrolled at the Tenshinkan Dojo, headquarters of the Aikido Association of America (AAA). The Norwalk dojo was opened in 1999 with the support of the association.

As with many martial arts, mastery of the Aikido technique makes it appear effortless and fun, but to reach the aforementioned level of skill takes a deep commitment and focus. Guilbault manages to transcend the form of his craft to capture its essence, which goes beyond the walls of the dojo. Elaborating on his belief that the practice transcends any particular category, he said, "Aikido is a physical, tactile experience, but it's much more than the self-defense facet of the practice that



has kept me and others coming back to it. It has many layers, and because of that there are many applications contained in it that I apply to my life. The dojo is its own world, but the same demons are inside the dojo as are outside, so how we approach learning the practice, with both a positive attitude and a sense of humor, matters. You have to be really present at all times in order to get the most from it.”

Guilbault is not making a living or feeding his family from the fees at the studio. “I work at my day job to keep these doors open,” he says, and it appears he has a strong spiritual connection to the practice. “Aikido is as close to church or God that I have.



I have the freedom to teach, and I love that. I also love the community and the camaraderie surrounding it. There’s a spirit of cooperation, an awareness of others, and a deeply ethical message contained in Aikido that matters to me and to all of us who participate.”

Aikido of Norwalk offers a special four-week introduction course every month designed for people with no prior martial arts experience. The cost is just \$40 for the entire course. Ongoing classes are held nightly, Monday through Thursday, and Saturdays.

More information is available at aikidonorwalk.com. The studio is located at **16 Commerce Street**; phone: **203-216-4877**.

