



NORWALK CITIZEN-NEWS photos / Johnathon Henninger

At the recently opened Yanagi Aikido Dojo at 16 Commerce St., chief instructor Corey Guilbault demonstrates a wrist hold that is the beginning of a pin move that his introductory students practice. Below, Guilbault teaches his students a roll from a standing position.

Harmonious Movement

Aikido Dojo Opens On Commerce Street

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After studying Aikido for 16 years and heeding the advice of his mentor, Corey Guilbault has found a way to spread the word about the martial arts form that has helped to guide him through the trials and tribulations in his life.

Just over three months ago, Guilbault established the Yanagi Aikido Dojo at 16 Commerce St.. "This is a very different form of martial arts that can help you in everyday life, not just physical confrontations. If someone attacks you verbally, the principles learned here help you to redirect that negativity without harming anyone," Guilbault said.

The roots of Aikido date back to pre-World War II. Morihei Ueshiba, referred to as O'Sensei by students, was the founder of the art form. According to Guilbault, O'Sensei found flaws in many forms of martial arts because too much focus was being placed on winning and losing. He believed that the focus should be on conflict resolution and mastering the use of a hostile individual's energy to his or her disadvantage. Diminutive in stature, O'Sensei had the ability to effortlessly defend himself from younger and stronger attackers because of the skills that he'd honed over many years of training. He also believed in harmony and compassion, even when it came to an attacker. He cared for his attacker's well-being as much as he did his own.

To honor O'Sensei at the Yanagi Aikido Dojo, a small altar-like structure has been erected near the front of the establishment, displaying his picture, incense and a book of Aikido principles.

Prior to every class, the incense is burned to set the proper mood. "This is meant to be

your time," Guilbault said. "We want you to feel better about yourself when you walk out of here."

Aikido benefits those who study it in seven different ways: improving flexibility, increasing stamina, developing self-discipline, improving mind-body coordination, calming the mind, finding strength without muscle, and improving self-defense skills, said Guilbault. "This is really a refreshing, I have been told. So many people have come in here and said, 'This is just what I have been looking for.' We have a relaxed atmosphere and do everything with a smile."

In addition to Guilbault, who is the chief instructor, Chett Rubenstein and Jason Goldstein lead the sessions at the dojo. The three teach a variety of adult classes Tuesday through Thursday from 7:30 to 8:30 and 8:30 to 9:30 p.m. Every Saturday, they offer youth sessions from 9:30 to 10:30 and 10:30 to 11:30 a.m.

The offerings for adults include introductory, basic and advanced Aikido, as well as a weapons class.

In the basic class, a wider range of techniques is explored, including tumbling skills and exercises that integrate the use of the mind and body.

The weapons class, which is open to beginners as well as experts, features the use of the traditional *bokken* (wooden sword), *jo* (short staff) and *tanto* (dagger). The students concentrate on holding the weapons properly, making correct strikes, disarming an attacker and preventing an attacker from taking the weapon.

With the exception of the advanced class, an \$85-a-month membership fee allows an adult to attend as many of the sessions as he or she would like. Family memberships run from \$145 to \$175 per month, depending on the number of participants, and longer memberships at discounted rates also are available. The four-week introductory course is offered for \$40.

The fees are used to pay the rent and to purchase equipment, Guilbault said. "Currently all of the money goes right back into the dojo. This is done for the love of the art. All of the instructors have other jobs."

In order to keep costs down, Guilbault said, it is important for all of the members to "take ownership of the dojo." The members assist with the basic upkeep of the studio, he said.

According to Guilbault, while Aikido has not yet gone mainstream, its popularity has been steadily growing. "There are no high-profile role models, with the exception of Steven Segal, but in the movies he doesn't practice the art form," he said, adding that Segal uses a Hollywood version of martial arts in his movies. Segal, however, has been a student of Aikido for many years, he said.

For more information, visit www.aikidonorwalk.com or call Guilbault at 216-4877.

