

## Tai Chi Chuan

Thursdays 10 - 11:30

Instructor: Janette Shelburne

Tai Chi was originally conceived as a martial art, developed by Chinese monks who wanted to be able to defend themselves. Today, Tai Chi has evolved into a graceful form of exercise that is suitable for all ages and has many health benefits. Indeed, some consider it to be a form of "meditation in motion."



Instructor Janette Shelburne is engaged in her own study of Tai Chi, and she is able to pass on what she learns to her students at the ONEgeneration Senior Enrichment Center. "It's great for your sense of balance and can help prevent falls," says Janette. "It is also good for the mind, and can be challenging. For example the sequence we are learning has 108 steps! But it is done with a lot of concentration at a calming pace. We concentrate on coordinating breathing with graceful, slow-motion movement. This gets oxygen flowing to the brain, increasing energy and improving coordination."

One of her students, Dan Moulthrop, relates that when he started with Janette's Tai Chi class around two years ago, he wore an oxygen tank on his back constantly, just to be able to breathe. But today there is no sign of that tank. "This class has helped me so much, I don't need the oxygen anymore! I only keep it around for emergencies," says Dan.

Other health benefits include lowering blood pressure, improving diabetes control, easing stress and generally contributing to a greater sense of well-being. "This is a 2000 year old system of movements for health," says Janette. "The benefits are now starting to be confirmed by the medical community."



Janette starts class with a hand rubbing warm up to generate energy. Then, as she guides the participants in circling their hips (both ways), Janette talks a little bit about the concept of Tai Chi. "Who remembers what Tai Chi Chuan means?" "Something Ultimate Fist", "Yes, Ultimate Fist Something", come the responses. "Very good. It's *Supreme Ultimate Fist*," Janette tells them. "But what does that mean?"

Janette explains that Chinese monks of hundreds of years ago didn't want to engage in violence yet needed a way to defend themselves against bandits. They developed a method where rather than fighting force with force, they would use their attacker's energy to move them out of the way. As she demonstrates on a student volunteer, she explains that this Tai Chi principle can be applied to everyday situations. For example, if someone is aggressive towards you, yelling or just being unpleasant, rather than engage you can "step aside" and let their energy wear out. Just quiet down and ask yourself "is this my fight?" Many times if you just listen, the aggressor will feel heard and then withdraw.



The class continues with attention to breathing as the students roll their shoulders, stretch their hands above their heads, and "play piano" with their toes. Then they move into various positions and practice fending off. After moving through three sections, the class ends with a bow to honor the lineage of teachers.



Janette welcomes new students. "Anyone can join in at any time — it's a very non-intimidating process. The pace is slow and new participants are helped to catch up."