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New dojo houses Aikido

By JON ROBERTSON

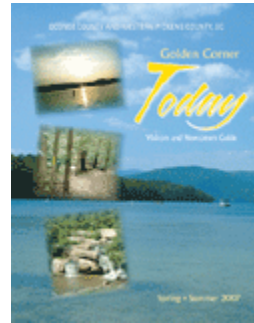
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James Bartee (far right), head trainer at Aikido of Lake Keowee, demonstrates the martial way of Aikido with his colleagues. Jon Robertson/Staff

SENECA - A Japanese garden greets those desiring the way of Aikido.

Aikido of Lake Keowee recently opened a new training hall, or "dojo," along Clemson Boulevard near Seneca. The dojo now holds classes for youths and



adults to learn a form of martial arts designed to strengthen physical and mental capabilities.

"It looks like a little shrine," said James Bartee, head instructor, or "sensei," for Aikido of Lake Keowee, regarding the new dojo. "It gives you a feeling of tranquility and professionalism."

With over 1,500 square feet of mat space, the dojo features birch-paneled walls with mahogany trim. Complete with greenery and a Japanese Tea Ceremony area, the dojo also sports a hand-built bamboo water fountain with a granite basin.

With origins in pre-World War II Japan, Aikido is the forging of unarmed grappling, spear- and sword-fighting with the ability to control an attacker's strength, balance and momentum.

"It's not about fighting," he said. "It should also be about polishing your spirit."

Immediate benefits of Aikido include physical health improvement and the expansion of self-defense techniques. However, Bartee said long-term practice can result in enhanced spiritual benefits, including stronger peace of mind.

"It's about learning how to resolve conflict. We make moral choices like we do in life," he said.

A fourth degree black belt in Aikido, Bartee is a retiree of the U.S. Secret Service, having served as a Senior Special Agent. He was assigned to protect Presidents Bush and Clinton as well as their respective families, with additional duties to protect presidential candidates and visiting heads of state.

Bartee conducts "Street Safe Seminar," a self-defense class at Clemson University. He is also accomplished in Bando Karate and Tae Kwon Do, among other martial arts methods.



"Instead of reactions, I try to teach you responses," he said. "It's using their body movement and catching them."

Those choosing weapons practice can work with a knife, staff or wooden sword. Realism is a major focus in training, with emphasis on situations of unfair odds and unplanned situations. Training is not competitive in nature, with no contests or trophies associated with classes.

No contracts are assigned through training and membership. Classes are available for youth ages 10 through 14, adult women and general adult sessions.

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