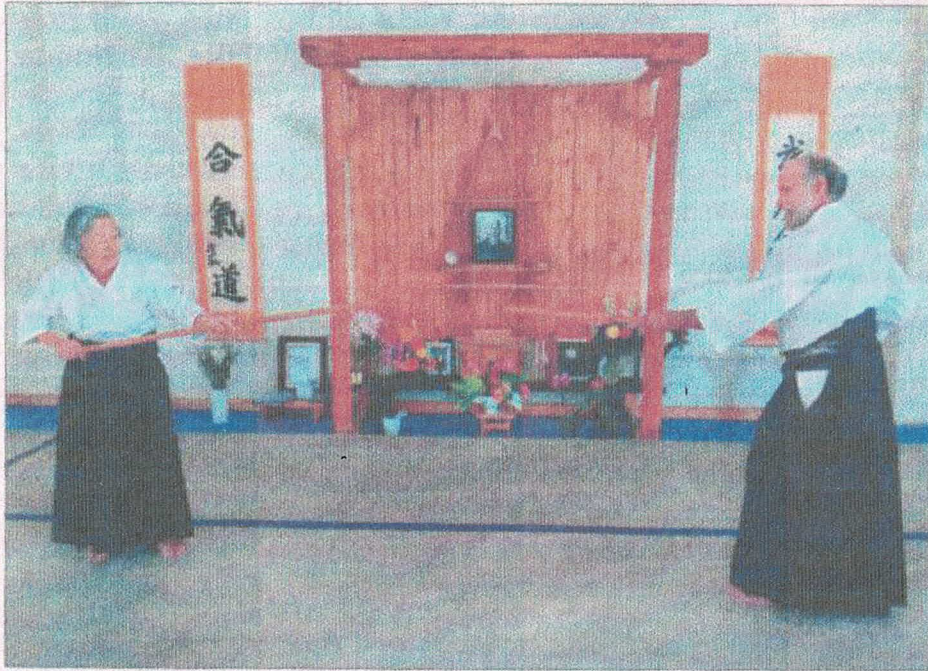


# Sensei Bernice Tom celebrates 50 years of training in Ocean Beach



Instructor Bernice Tom, Sensei (left) and her longtime student, and husband, Ben Teeter.  
DAVE SCHWAB/PENINSULA BEACON

By DAVE SCHWAB | The Beacon

Head instructor Bernice Tom at Sunset Cliffs Aikido is celebrating dual milestones this year: 40 years in Ocean Beach and 50 years of training and teaching Japanese martial arts.

Located in a spacious building at 5019 Santa Monica Ave., this iconic dojo is now celebrating its 40th anniversary a half block from the beach. The Dojo is also celebrating Sensei Bernice Tom's achievement in reaching the rare mark of 50 years of training and teaching Aikido.

Of Chinese descent, Tom spoke of the unorthodox path she's taken to teach a Japanese martial art,

something her family disapproved of. "It (career choice) was not very popular with my mom who grew up in China during World War II, so they (the Japanese who invaded China) were not a favored part of her culture," said Tom, who attended the University of California, Berkeley studying Chinese martial arts and spent her early adulthood in San Francisco. "A friend of mine told me about the Aikido school near my house."

Surprisingly, Tom didn't take to Aikido immediately because "you did a lot of tumbling and rolling and I did not like rolling."

But Tom came back after a year's hiatus because "I decided if I did this I would have to be serious.

So I did it – and I haven't stopped since."

For Tom, aikido has become a lifetime lifestyle. Asked if she will ever retire she replied: "Aikido people never retire," adding she believes practicing the martial arts helps keep her young. "My mission is just to keep teaching as long as I can for whoever wants to learn," she added.

Recently, about 50 students and alumni nationwide, and as far away as Switzerland, gathered to celebrate Tom's martial arts milestones on Feb. 9-11. Their reunion involved Aikido training, catching up on old friendships, sharing stories, and enjoying good food.

Tom summarized her tenure in OB by asking, "How many businesses around me have closed and opened (over the years)?"

Ben Teeter, Tom's husband and a longtime student of hers at Sunset Cliffs Aikido, talked about how the founder reversed the focus of

the militaristic Japanese martial art. "He (Morihei Ueshiba) became spiritually awakened and he was a super martial artist who'd learned from one of the last remaining samurai, who knew everything. And he asked, 'Why should anybody get hurt if they're this good; I'll just stop them.' And his spiritual teacher advised, 'Do it (teaching) differently.' That's where he got the idea for art that stops violence and nobody gets hurt. It's not just self-defense; It's just a harmonious end to something conflicted."

Teeter talked about his conversion to Aikido many years ago. "It was three miles from my house and I walked in here, a guy showed me a technique, and I was sold," he recalled.

Teeter said Dojo members pay a membership fee which entitles them to train in all the various classes offered. Of practicing Aikido, Teeter concluded: "It changes your dreams and your

## SUNSET CLIFFS AIKIDO DOJO

Where: 5019 Santa Monica Ave.

Contact: [sunsetcliffsaikido.com](http://sunsetcliffsaikido.com), 619-757-3798.

Over 40 years, Sunset Cliffs Aikido has served the San Diego community with a complete program of classes for children and adults. Bernice Tom, Sensei (teacher) is highly regarded in the Aikido world for her extensive knowledge and skill. She is one of the very few women in the world who are ranked Seventh Degree Black Belt in the art. She trained for many extended periods at the Iwama, Japan dojo of the creator and founder of the art, Morihei Ueshiba. Her teacher was the founder's long-time student, Morihiro Saito, Sensei.

social life. The main benefit of this training is in life. People have said they were able to start their small-business from the confidence they gained here."

For more information, visit [sunsetcliffsaikido.com](http://sunsetcliffsaikido.com)