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Champion COMMUNITY *Page*

Chinese art of tai chi offers a 'time-out' opportunity for those who are stressed out

By **STEPHANIE THIESSEN**

The Champion

For many Milton residents, Sunday mornings mean time to catch up on some much-needed sleep after a hectic week.

Ed Cooper has a different way of recovering from the week's stresses.

Every Sunday morning, he and a group of Miltonians can be found in Victoria Park at Town Hall practicing the ancient Chinese art of tai chi, an exercise Mr. Cooper says is both relaxing and invigorating.

"I like to get out and flap my arms," said Mr. Cooper, laughing, and admitting they must look humorous to people who know nothing about tai chi.

The group has been meeting for the past 10 years, rain or shine. Each Sunday morning class is free, which Mr. Cooper said is his way of giving back to the community.

"We get 75-year-old women, 25-year-old guys and all ages in between," he said.

Mr. Cooper said some people wonder how the Sunday morning group can keep practicing outside, even in the winter.

"We dress warmly and keep moving," he said.

He explained that although tai chi movements are performed slowly, the activity generates internal heat, which radiates outward to create a feeling of well-being.

Besides being a tai chi instructor, Mr. Cooper is also an accredited tai chi competition judge.

Tai chi was initially practiced as a martial art, he explained. Each move can be used as a defence against an attack. As people began realizing the health benefits, tai chi grew in popularity.

Tai chi involves movements that appear tranquil and serene, Mr. Cooper said. There are no jerky movements, just smooth, flowing, energizing patterns. Tai chi softens the joints in people who tend to be stiff, and gives energy to people who struggle with fatigue and lethargy, he said.

"Although it looks simple to do, tai chi requires effort in learning the sequence of movements and training oneself to let go of tension in the body," he said, adding that it's important to have an experienced

teacher.

Mr. Cooper teaches formal classes in his Circle of Friends Tai Chi Club, which is also celebrating its 10th anniversary. The classes take place at the Milton Seniors' Activity Centre, but are for people of all ages.

Mr. Cooper recently retired from the corporate world and is now spending more time pursuing his passion for tai chi and sharing it with others. In fact, he'll soon be bringing tai chi instruction to bed and breakfast facilities, golf courses and corporate boardrooms.

"Who needs a stress reliever more than a busy executive? After a short session, we send them back to work energized and refreshed."

Today's society is extremely stressful, he said. Tai chi provides a 'time-out' opportunity so people can cope more easily with life's demands.

Although most students use their tai chi for relaxation and stress relief, Mr. Cooper said tai chi can also be effective in pain management for arthritis sufferers. Range of motion, power and balance may be limited for those with arthritis, he said. Tai chi strengthens the support around the joints to help keep a person active.

Mr. Cooper was introduced to tai chi when he travelled to Malaysia in the early '70s.

"I came back to Canada and as life became busier and more stressful, I thought I'd pick up tai chi again," he said.

Although people who decide to take up tai chi will notice health benefits immediately, there are also long-term benefits that come about as the art is practiced and refined, Mr. Cooper said.

"The more you invest, the more you get back out," he said. "It's like investing money. Over time, you see more benefits."


Mr. Cooper is currently holding an Introduction to Tai Chi class Mondays at the Milton Seniors' Activity Centre, 500 Childs Dr. He said there's still time and space for some new members. Those interested in joining can call Mr. Cooper at (905) 878-8647. Those interested in the Sunday morning classes at Victoria Park are welcome to simply show up at 10 a.m.

Stephanie Thiessen can be reached at sthiessen@miltoncanadianchampion.com.



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Ed Cooper leads the Circle of Friends Tai Chi Club, which meets year-round at Victoria Park Sunday mornings. Here, Mr. Cooper and group member Kathy Braun show some moves.

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Programming Schedule – Tuesday, October 26 - Monday, November 3rd, 2003

Tuesday, October 28	Wednesday, October 29	Thursday, October 30	Friday, October 31	Sunday, November 2	Monday, November 3
5, 6 & 7:30pm Plugged In! Early Week Edition	5, & 6 pm Plugged In! Early Week Edition	5, & 6pm Plugged In! Early Week Edition	5pm, 6pm Plugged In! Late Week Edition	10:30pm Cogeco Sports: HS Football Division 1 Playoffs	5, 6 & 7:30pm Plugged In! Late Week Edition
5:30pm Seniors Showcase	5:30pm Halton Votes: Milton Ward 2	5:30pm Osler Health Connection	5:30pm	5pm, 6pm Plugged In! Late Week Edition	5:30pm Halton Votes: Milton Ward 1
6:30pm Optimist TV Bingo (Live)	6:30pm Be Inspired	6:30pm Main Street	6:30pm	6:30pm Be Inspired	6:30pm Halton Votes: Guelph/Eramosa
7:00pm COGECO Customer Call-In Show (Live)	7:00pm Swap Talk (Live)	7:30pm Halton Votes: Guelph/Eramosa	7:30pm	7:00pm Seniors Showcase	7:00pm Halton Region Chairman
8:30pm Halton Votes: Milton Ward 4	8:00pm Halton Votes: Milton Mayor	8:00pm Halton Votes: Halton Hills Mayor	8:00pm	7:00pm Osler Health Connection	8:00pm SportsZONE Live
9:00pm Milton Mayoral Debate	8:30pm Halton Votes: Milton Ward 3 & Trustees	8:30pm Halton Votes: Milton Ward 1	8:30pm	8:00pm Milton Mayoral Debate	
10:30pm Halton Hills Council: Oct. 20	9:00pm Halton Hills Mayoral Debate			9:30pm Halton Hills Mayoral Debate	
	10:30pm Milton Council: Oct. 20				

Milton JC's Mayoral Debate: Tues, Oct. 28th 9pm