10th Anniversary Celebration
May 31 – June 1, 2014
“The Art of Peace is to fulfill that which is lacking.”
Morihei Ueshiba, O Sensei from The Art of Peace

A Message from Aikido of Minnesota’s President

A warm welcome to all! I am grateful to everyone who is here in body or in spirit to celebrate our 10th Anniversary. It hardly seems possible that ten years have passed since a small group began training in the crisp early mornings at Desnoyer Park, inspired by the wisdom and leadership of Okimura Shihan and the promise of warm coffee after practice. From our humble beginnings, we remain humble but dedicated. We practice in a small dojo with abundant character and good cheer. Many of us still depend on early morning practice to start our day, even when it’s below zero and snowing. Along the way we have forged friendships, trained hard, and occasionally had an insight into this elusive Art that we love. Deep thanks to our Sister Dojos, to all those who have helped us in so many ways, and to Zohreh Sensei and Okimura Shihan for illuminating the Way.

Chris Carlson
President, Aikido of Minnesota
31 MAY 2014

Mary Olympia Sensei
Aikido of Minnesota
710 Snelling Avenue North
St. Paul, MN 55104

Dear Olympia Sensei:

Congratulations to the Aikido of Minnesota, a WAAI Family, as you and members celebrate your 10th anniversary of the dojo!

Happy 10th Anniversary Aikido Kids! Your dojo made ten years old, congratulations!

May the lessons of the before push us presently closer to understand the teachings of O Sensei. May you, current members, and future members enjoy the Aikido skinship offered at the Aikido of Minnesota dojo. Wishing prosperous dojo growth in the coming decades and more, giving us good reasons for many WAAI Family Dojo celebrations.

Please extend my warmest greetings to your members’ families, and all who have gathered in support to this grand 10th anniversary celebration.

In Gassho,

Rev. Zenko N. Okimura, Shihan
Chairman
Aikido of Minnesota
c/o Mary Olympia Sensei
710 Snelling Avenue N
St. Paul, MN 55104

May 31, 2014

Dear Olympia Sensei,

We wish abundant joy to you, AOM Board Members, Instructors, Aikido Kids, dojo Members and their families, and the many supporters to the Aikido of Minnesota Dojo on your 10th Anniversary Celebration.

As a WAAI Member Dojo, learn from the past and practice in the present. Our future is the hope to express in gratitude O Sensei wishes through the teachings of our Shihan.

May the Aikido of Minnesota Dojo enjoy and celebrate 10 decades and more of prosperous growth.

Sincerely,

Dr. Zohreh Soofi
ADA Chief Instructor

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Morihei Ueshiba, known as O Sensei (Great Teacher), is the founder of Aikido. He was born in 1883 in rural Wakayama Prefecture, Japan. His early dedication to strengthening himself led him to seek out and study under masters of many traditional Japanese martial arts. His study brought him to an understanding of several arts including jujutsu (weaponless combat), kenjutsu (sword), and sojutsu (spear). Embarking on a quest to overcome the limitations of physical strength and even technical mastery, he became immersed in religious and philosophical studies as well. While his strength and skill are well documented, his greatest legacy lies in the principles of nonviolence and human integrity he left to mankind embodied in the art of Aikido. O Sensei wrote: “Budo (the Martial Way) is not felling the opponent by our force; nor is it a tool to lead the world into destruction with arms. True Budo is to accept the spirit of the universe, keep the peace of the world, correctly produce, protect and cultivate all things in nature.” Practicing and teaching Aikido were an integral part of the founder’s life, and he continued his pursuit to the age of 86. O Sensei passed away on April 26, 1969, leaving the art of Aikido as the ultimate testament to his search for inner truth.
Aikido of Minnesota was formed in the spring of 2004 by a group of students who were dedicated to furthering their study of Aikido under the direction of Reverend Zenko N. Okimura, Shihan. The resolve of those students was clear to any who drove by Desnoyer Park in St. Paul on the chilly April and early May mornings of that year. It was then and there that those students held 6:30 a.m. aiki taisu and weapons practice, ignored their cold-numbed fingers and the jeers of passers-by (“Freaks!”), and laid the foundation of AoM.

Aikido of Minnesota became a legal entity on May 13, 2004, when Dan Pederson and Pete Godfrey filed AoM's articles of incorporation. Lacking a dojo, the organization's address was listed as Marla Spivak's home. From the By-Laws, Aikido of Minnesota's purpose was given as follows:

AoM is organized exclusively for educational purposes. The actions of this organization shall be guided by the following purposes: to provide training and education in the art and spirit of Aikido; to be guided under the leadership of the Aikikai Foundation, Aikido World Headquarters, Tokyo, Japan; to establish and maintain relations with appropriate regional, national and international Aikido organizations; and to foster and encourage the spirit and highest ideals of the teachings of the Founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba.

The founding members believed that Okimura Shihan was uniquely qualified to guide the organization in fulfilling that purpose. Having served previously as a board member of Okimura Shihan's World Aikido Akikai Incorporated (WAAI) organization, Peter Price sought and received Shihan's blessing for the new endeavor, and AoM became an affiliate of WAAI. WAAI affiliation gives Aikido of Minnesota a direct link to the Aikikai Foundation and a direct line of heritage tracing back to the Founder, O Sensei. This lineage shows on the rank board at WAAI headquarters in Delaware.

The charter Board of Directors was voted into place on May 15, 2004, at a sunny afternoon gathering in Craig Johnson's backyard in Bloomington. Dan Pederson was chosen as AoM’s first Chief Instructor. Morning classes continued in Desnoyer Park, not far from the corporate headquarters, until Pete Godfrey reached an agreement with the Midway Family YMCA that allowed AoM to rent space for morning and weekend classes. With an interest free loan from Catherine Stenzel, Dan Browning arranged for AoM to purchase, at a substantial discount, a set of 50 used-just-once Zebra mats following a judo tournament at Hamline University.
Aikido of Minnesota’s first indoor class was held at the Midway YMCA on May 22, 2004. The initial schedule had classes every morning at 6:30 AM (6:45 on Wednesdays) and at 3:15 PM on Saturdays and Sundays. Warm up for class involved laying out the 50 mats, each weighing about 50 pounds. There were ongoing efforts to find the mat pattern that was most stable under class activity. “Cool down” involved restacking the mats onto their industrial strength wooden storage carts, built by master craftsman David Dedrick.

Aikido of Minnesota held its first seminar, dubbed the Welcome Seminar, with Okimura Shihan and guest instructor Scott Sobel Sensei on August 21-22, 2004. Saturday’s practice was held in one half of the YMCA’s large gym. A curtain split the gym between open court basketball practice and our seminar. Only a few basketballs bounced through to our side, but the sound was often thunderous. In a later Y gym seminar, Okimura Shihan, as always, found a way to harmonize, working his jump shot movement into the practice.
AoM’s first Kagami Biraki Seminar was held on February 5-6, 2005. The seminar included Okimura Shihan blessing our shomen, beautifully crafted by David Dedrick, and the first tests of AoM students. Although the sake was very dry (no alcohol at the Y!) and the mochi’s “daidai” leaf may have required a bit of glue, the spirit of a new beginning was pervasive. Aikido of Minnesota was up and running, with visitors willing to travel Minnesota’s winter roads to celebrate and train with Okimura Shihan and Zohreh Soofi Sensei.

In August, 2005, Aikido of Minnesota applied for, and subsequently received 501(c)(3) non-profit status.

Practice continued at the YMCA for several years, eventually including children’s and teens’ classes, while the Board built savings from dues and donations. In late 2006, the Board conducted a dojo feasibility study and the search for space began. Charles “Chuckido” Cohen found a print shop at 710 Snelling Ave. N in St. Paul that was vacating its space. The lease was signed on October 31.
Though many helped, it was Pete Godfrey, Chuckido and Dave Dedrick who ripped out the walls, pulled up the carpet, and generally did the work of 20 men to transform the print shop into a dojo. Without their superhuman effort to build the dojo, Aikido of Minnesota, as we know it, would not exist today. A DFL election committee office that was liquidating all of its equipment provided cubicle walls that became the changing rooms. Mary Olympia Sensei chose the paint colors, and just one month later, on December 1, 2006, the first class was held in Aikido of Minnesota’s new home.

October 30, 2006: Signing the Lease

November 6, 2006: Building a Dojo

A Space Transformed

December 1, 2006: First Dojo Class

Ten months later, Aikido of Minnesota held its Dojo Grand Opening Seminar on September 13-15, 2007. The weekend began with a dojo blessing by Okimura Shihan and barbeque dinner in the parking lot. Having moved from the YMCA, seminar classes were held at the University of Minnesota Armory, as they would be for the following six years. The group photo for Aikido of Minnesota’s Grand Opening Seminar shows clearly how far Aikido of Minnesota, under the guidance of Okimura Shihan, had come since those chilly mornings in the park.
Aikido of Minnesota agreed to share its Snelling Avenue space with Dan Browning Sensei’s Shinzen Kai jujitsu group. Their contributions to the dojo made stable growth possible and strengthened both groups. Since its founding, Aikido of Minnesota members have travelled each year to WAAI headquarters at the Aikido Delaware Aikikai for O Sensei Memorial, as well as joining in other WAAI seminars from Baltimore to Bellingham. AoM members have represented WAAI in Hawaii at the 50th Anniversary of the Hawaii Aikikai, the first nonprofit Aikido organization in the U.S., and at the 50th Anniversary Celebration of O Sensei’s visit to Hawaii, his one and only trip outside of Japan after establishing Aikido there. AoM members have regularly performed demonstrations at Japan America Society of Minnesota events. Members have also represented WAAI at Aikido seminars from Wisconsin to Nebraska and built a network of mutual support throughout the midwest. With fellow WAAI dojos at the University of Minnesota, in Grand Marais, Warroad, and Morris, Aikido of Minnesota has hosted seminars with Okimura Shihan and Zohreh Soofi Sensei twice each year, fostering and encouraging the spirit and highest ideals of the teachings of the Founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba.
The Too Cold, The Too Hot, and The Just Right
Our Shihan takes ukemi!

In the fall of 2013, the University of Minnesota’s Armory was no longer available as a seminar location. The Shuharikan Dojo, affiliated with the International Yoshinkan Aikido Federation, welcomed Okimura Shihan into their space for the Autumn Seminar. Aikido of Minnesota’s 10th Anniversary Seminar will also be hosted by the Shuharikan Dojo. The true spirit of aikido could not be more apparent, and the kindness of the Shuharikan Dojo is an inspiration to us all.

From the early practices in Desnoyer Park and for a decade thereafter, Daniel Pederson Sensei chaired Aikido of Minnesota’s Technical Committee as Chief Instructor. His years of dedicated service are gratefully acknowledged. In December, 2013, Mary Olympia Sensei became AoM’s second Chief Instructor. The 10th Anniversary Seminar is Olympia Sensei’s first major event as Chief Instructor. Should Okimura Shihan pose the question, “Who is your sensei?” to one of the AoM students at this seminar, we have every confidence that Shihan’s question will have been spurred by the wondrous aiki spirit imbued to that student by Olympia Sensei. We wish her the best of luck at the helm!
Rev. Zenko N. Okimura, Shihan

Founder & Chief Instructor of the World Aikido Aikikai Incorporated. Rev. Zenko N. Okimura, was born in Iwakuni, Japan and is the eldest son of Bishop & Mrs. Eisho Okimura. Okimura Shihan began his Aikido study in 1963, and received his 1st Dan in 1968 from the Founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba. He currently holds a 7th Dan certified instructors rank. The present Doshu, Moriteru Ueshiba, grandson of the Founder, and Okimura Shihan studied under Doshu Kisshomaru Ueshiba, son of the Founder, at Aikido World Headquarters in Tokyo. Okimura Shihan has been a Head Aikido Instructor in both Japan and Hawaii. He has taught Aikido in Europe as well as throughout the United States. Okimura Shihan is also a Shingon Buddhist priest and has served under Bishop Eisho Okimura after attaining priesthood at Mt. Koya Monastery in Wakayama, Japan. Okimura Shihan brings great technical and spiritual depth to the students of our WAAI organization. He holds college degrees in Religion and Education.

Dr. Zohreh Soofi

Under the guidance of Rev. Zenko Okimura Shihan, Dr. Zohreh Soofi is the Chief Instructor at Aikido Delaware Aikikai. Zohreh Sensei is the first female Aikikai Aikido Chief Instructor in the State of Delaware. Zohreh Sensei began her Aikido study in 1995 under Okimura Shihan, and currently holds a 4th Dan Shidoin instructors rank. Zohreh Sensei has directly assisted Okimura Shihan in instruction of both adult and children’s classes; she has worked with Shihan throughout the continental United States and in Hawaii. She accompanied Okimura Shihan to Hombu Dojo in Tokyo where Shihan received his 7th Dan certificate, personally from Doshu Moriteru Ueshiba, grandson of the Founder. Sensei holds a doctorate degree in education, a distinct advantage as the Head Instructor of the Aikido Kids program at the ADA Dojo since 1998. This program includes not only the physical martial art of Aikido, but also exposure to a multi-cultural environment, as well as, discussions with her students about how to grow and develop into respected and productive citizens. Prior to her long path on Aikido, Sensei studied Karate for nearly a decade, and achieved a dan rank in that martial art. Despite her experience in other martial arts, Zohreh Sensei has dedicated her life to teaching the art and peaceful values that are at the heart of Aikido.
Acknowledgements

Heartfelt Mention

Our deepest appreciation goes to Reverend Zenko N. Okimura, Shihan for inspiring the founding of Aikido of Minnesota and for supporting and guiding us along the Way.

Distinguished Service

In recognition of service as members of Aikido of Minnesota’s Board of Directors, as instructors, and as exceptional contributors to the development of the dojo and organization, we thank:

- Thierry Ajas
- Catherine Brennan
- Daniel Browning
- Chris Carlson
- Charles “Chuckido” Cohen
- David Dedrick
- Brandon Due
- Marc Gahie
- Kenneth S. Gellner
- Terrance P. Godfrey
- Leigh Jirges
- Craig A. Johnson
- Oleksandr Moskalenko
- Mary Olympia
- Daniel Pederson
- Stanley Potts
- Peter Price
- Jes Siiteri
- Katherine Smith
- Marla Spivak
- Catherine Stenzel
- Kevin Weckwerth

Distinguished Support

Without the contributions of Shinzen Kai Danzan Ryu Jujitsu, its founder, Dan Browning Sensei, its current Sensei, Nate Hill, and all of its members, Aikido of Minnesota’s home at 710 Snelling Avenue would not be possible. For their distinguished support, we owe our deepest gratitude.

Honorable Support

Our honorable thanks to the following instructors and their dojo members for their generous support toward the growth of Aikido of Minnesota and the fulfillment of its mission:

- Zenko N. Okimura Shihan & World Aikido Aikikai Incorporated
- Zohreh Soofi Sensei & the Aikido Delaware Aikikai members
- Catherine Stenzel Sensei & the Aikido of Northwest Minnesota members
- Craig Waver Sensei & the Grand Marais Aikikai members
- Eric Buchanan Sensei & the Prairie Winds Aikikai members
- Spencer Anthony-Cahill Sensei & the Kulshan Aikikai members
- Patrick Riley Sensei & the University of Minnesota Aikido Club members
- Sam Elmore Sensei & the Tostared Aikikai members
- Rana Dutta Sensei & the World Aikido Aikikai India members
- Marcus Lynch & the Aikido West Chester Aikikai members
- Michael Ellefson Sensei & the Midwest Center for Movement & associated dojo members
- Scott Sobel Sensei & the Baltimore Aikido Academy members
Honorable Support (cont’d)

Our honorable thanks to the following instructors and their dojo members for their generous support toward the growth of Aikido of Minnesota and the fulfillment of its mission:

Ronald Christenham Sensei & the Sarpy Aikido Club members
Lloyd McWhirt & Claudia Brown Senseis & the Aikido Shuurin Dojo members
Jon Popele Sensei & the Minnesota Ki Society members
Jon Sharratt, Gordon Shumaker, and Glen Giacoletto Senseis & the Shuharikan Dojo members

In Appreciation and Recognition

In appreciation and recognition for support, effort, contributions and dedication that have enabled Aikido of Minnesota to succeed through its first ten years:

Dr. Zohreh Soofi: For all of your efforts to show us how to be students.
Catherine Stenzel: Your generosity is the mat that we stand on.
Charles “Chuckido” Cohen: The heart of AoM. You are always in ours.
David Dedrick: We bow to your efforts every day and miss you with every bow.
Terrance “Big Pete” Godfrey: For getting the job done, whatever it was, whenever it was needed.
Dr. Marla Spivak: Our window glows because of you.
Peter DuFault: For donating the fruits of your efforts. We are stronger for them.
The Walmart Foundation: For contributing to our effort to build a stronger community.

In Our Old Age and Confusion

To those unsung, unnamed, unrecognized and seemingly unappreciated many who have not seen here in print their names and the thanks that should go to them, we ask for your forgiveness. 10 years of conditioning the mats appear to have taken their toll on the fading memory of this already seasoned booklet writer (PEP). We know that Aikido of Minnesota owes its existence to countless contributors over its first decade. Every person who has ever stepped on the mat has been a part of this adventure. It has enriched us all, and we are truly grateful that you have been with us.

The 10th Anniversary Celebration “Committee”

To all who have contributed to the organization of this anniversary, our sincere gratitude, with special thanks to Brandon Due, Steve Gellner, Leigh Jirges, Mary Olympia, Kat Smith, and Marla Spivak.
Dear Olympia Sensei,
I sincerely hope your dojo would see the new height of success...
Regards,
Rana Dutta

Dear Aikido of Minnesota,
Congratulations on 10 years of teaching and promoting Okimura Shihan's Aikido in the Twin Cities. Over the past 10 or more years I have thoroughly enjoyed the time spent with AoM members on and off the mat. I know we have a geographic distance, however every time I meet with AoM members I feel a warmth and common appreciation for a certain kind of Aikido that is undeniable. Congratulations again on this great achievement and I wish you many more years of success and growth at your dojo.
-Lynch Sensei
Ten years of passing on the legacy of O Sensei!
Congratulations to Aikido of Minnesota for this milestone achievement. The future was unclear when twenty Aikidoists diverged to follow Okimura Shihan, but the decade that has passed has brought rich rewards, shared problem-solving, and a community of sister dojos. The ancient ways of budo are alive and well at AoM. It would make O Sensei smile. Here’s to ten times ten times ten times ten future years of great Aikido. Wishing you all the best . . .

Aikido Northwest Minnesota

To Aikido of Minnesota,
Congratulations on your 10 year anniversary. The members of Shinzenkai send their heartfelt gratitude for our relationship and hope to see it continue into your next 10 years.

Warmest regards,
Shinzenkai Danzan Ryu Jujitsu
O-medeto gozaimasu!

The members of Kulshan Aikikai send our warmest greetings and congratulations to Aikido of Minnesota on the occasion of your 10th anniversary! It is always a pleasure to share “skinship” with our good friends from Minnesota—may we enjoy many more years of training together!

In gassho,

Spencer Anthony-Cahill
Chief Instructor, Kulshan Aikikai

Grand Marais Aikikai would like to extend congratulations to Aikido of Minnesota on their ten year Anniversary.

May our paths continue to cross for many more years
A Message from Aikido of Minnesota’s Chief Instructor

Aikido of Minnesota. That would be our name, proudly asserted and claimed ten years ago. There were the outdoor practices on early frosty May mornings in Desnoyer Park, while we searched for a home. Then there was our temporary home at the Midway YMCA, where we schlepped mats to and from the closet each practice. And finally, we moved into our current home at 710 N. Snelling Avenue, where a printing shop was first gutted before it could be metamorphosed into a dojo.

Aikido of Minnesota. We owe our existence to Okimura Shihan. Ten years ago, we believed we saw a special teacher in Shihan, so we followed our dream to form our own dojo to continue to learn Aikido from a true teacher of this Way. Ten years later, our gratitude to Shihan is even more profound. He is the glue that binds our dojo to a common purpose of striving to practice peaceful ways within community, and he illuminates and guides our path of discovery in this practice we call ai-ki-do.

Aikido of Minnesota. Here’s to the multitude of helping hands, many of whom are named in this publication. To all of you, who established, built, and maintained this wonderful dojo in body and spirit, we honor your commitment, your work, your help. Special recognition goes to Dan Pederson Sensei, who guided us as chief instructor our first decade.

Thank you all.

Here’s to ten more years as a community, and ten more after that, and ten more… Kampai!

Mary Olympia Sensei
Chief Instructor, Aikido of Minnesota
10th Anniversary Seminar

Seminar Schedule

Saturday, May 31 at AoM (am) / Shuharikan Dojo (pm)

- Dojo Blessing and Testing (at AoM) 8:30 am – 11:00 am
- Lunch 11:00 am – 12:30 pm
- Registration (at Shuharikan Dojo) 12:30 pm – 12:50 pm
- Class (children and adults) 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm
- Class 2:15 pm – 3:30 pm
- Class 3:45 pm – 5:00 pm
- Banquet at Joseph’s Grill 7:30 pm – 10:00 pm

Please bring your own jo and bokken.

Sunday, June 1 at Shuharikan Dojo

- Class 9:00 am – 10:30 am
- Class (Q & A) 10:45 am – 12:00 pm

Seminar and Banquet Fees:
- Saturday and Sunday: $75 / $90 w/banquet
- Saturday Only: $55 / $70 w/banquet
- Sunday Only: $30
- Banquet Only: $20 ($7.50 for children)

For additional information please visit our website at www.aikidominnesota.org

“Failure is the key to success. Each mistake teaches us something.”
Morihei Ueshiba, O Sensei from The Art of Peace