

Sword and Spirit

The Journal of Itten Dojo

December 2022



— Why Budo? —

Regardless of the times in which you live, or the circumstances of your life, success largely depends on things you can control:

- **Building a foundation of strong relationships in a community of mutual support and achievement.**
- **Forging a disciplined and positive mindset.**
- **Enhancing your physical health and capabilities.**

These are exactly the benefits membership in an authentic dojo provides.

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Looking Back, and Ahead

Having finally decided on the topic for this month, I sat down this morning in front of my laptop to make a list of the significant events of the past year. And, I have to admit, I was kind of astonished. Time passes so quickly, compounded by the fact serious students of *budo*, the Japanese martial Ways, tend to live more in the present moment than is typical in the general population—it's easy to lose track of all that has happened. A lot has happened in 2022, and even more is on the horizon for 2023.

Most significantly, the dojo in September reached the 30th anniversary of its founding in 1992 by the Wolfes and the Starners. There are not many martial arts schools in this area that have been around as long, or longer, in their own facilities. Other than programs at local YMCAs, I can think of only a handful (all with long-time friends or acquaintances): Tom Joerg's American Karate Studio, John Null's Harrisburg Martial Arts Academy, Mike Rothermel's Harrisburg Kung Fu Center, and Vince Vergara's West Shore Martial Arts Academy. It's good company to be in.

Where we are now is the consequence of a series of events that by all rights ought to have been exceptionally detrimental to the survival of the dojo, but that in reality propelled us to new heights and opportunities. Reflecting on the recent past, I'm reminded of a quote (for which I can't find the source). It's something along the lines of, "We must be ready at any moment to surrender what we are for what we might become." In some circumstances we've experienced, things were surrendered; in others, things were taken from us. But in both instances, we opened our hands, let go, and were able thereby to take hold of something new.

Something new and much better.

Evolving from our legacy practices of aikijutsu and kenjutsu, the arts now available at our dojo include an unarmed focus expanding to incorporate the modern system of Nihon Jujutsu, the weapons-focused arts of Ono-ha Itto-ryu kenjutsu and Muso Jikiden Eishin-ryu iaido, and the cultural art of *shodo* (Japanese calligraphy). There is interest in establishing a study group to train in Goju-ryu karate. Each of these arts is a heritage-based study, with lineages and histories that are fascinating to explore.



Following are some of the most important events and accomplishments in 2022:

January

- Edorsement of aikijutsu *yudansha* (black-belt) ranks by the Nihonden Aikibujutsu Senyokai.
- Publication in *Bugeisha Traditional Martial Artist* magazine #11 of “Lessons from Joe Lewis” by Robert Wolfe, and the “Yin—Women in the Martial Arts” column by Jennifer Ziegler.

February

- Robert Wolfe *rokudan* promotion from Miguel Ibarra Sensei, Yamabushi Aikijutsu Jujutsu Association.

March

- *Nidan* promotion of dojo alumnus Peter Hobart in aikijutsu.

April

- *Yondan* promotions of Alan Starner and John Butz in aikijutsu, and instructor-licensing of John Butz.
- *Nidan* promotion of Charles Hudson in aikijutsu.
- Publication in *Bugeisha* #12 of “Why Iaido?” by Robert Wolfe.
- Weekend trip to JMAC for training in iaido, judo, and jujutsu.
- Jevin Orcutt’s donation of the gorgeous *kaķemono* (hanging scroll) that now graces our *tokonoma* (alcove).



May

- Go-live of the new ittendojo.org website, built for us by Michigan SEO Group and hosted by Network Services Group.
- Mark Hague Sensei joins the staff as instructor-in-residence for Ono-ha Itto-ryu kenjutsu.

June

- Weekend trip to JMAC for training in iaido, and our “official” start in jujutsu.
- Publication of *The Trials of Magnus*—first novel by dojo member J. Charles Ramirez.

July

- Publication in *Bugeisha* #13 of “Break the Stalemate—Overcoming Tsuba-zeriai” by Robert Wolfe.
- 12th annual dojo pool party and cookout, hosted at their home by the Zieglers.

August

- Suino Sensei and assistant instructors from JMAC visit our dojo for training in iaido and jujutsu.

September

- 30th anniversary of the founding of Itten Dojo, with a black-tie dinner celebration at the Harrisburg Hilton.

October

- Publication in *Bugeisha* #14 of “An Illuminating Fourth” and “The Craft of Dojo Signboards” by Robert Wolfe, and the “Yin—Women in the Martial Arts” column by Jennifer Ziegler.
- Rie Hashimoto Bailey Sensei joins the staff as instructor for shodo.
- First meeting of the shodo class. There are a dozen students already training or planning to start in this program.
- At the invitation of Professor Akiko Megura, Robert Wolfe and Sarah St. Angelo present a demonstration of iaido, aikijutsu/ujutsu, and aikiken to students enrolled in Japanese language classes at Dickinson College in Carlisle. The photo on the first page of this issue is from that event.



November

- Weekend trip to JMAC for training in iaido, judo, and jujutsu.
- Hague Sensei, Manning Sensei, and Gary Burkett travel to the Reigakudo in Tokyo, Japan, to attend an international seminar taught by Yabuki Yuji Doshu, the headmaster of mainline Ono-ha Itto-ryu.

December

- Publication in *Bugeisha* #15 of “Introduction to Aikijo” by Robert Wolfe, and “Benefits Beyond Technique” by Sarah St. Angelo.
- Acceptance of the dojo (aikijutsu section) for membership in the Japanese Budo Association, headquartered in Tokyo, Japan.

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We stand poised to enter 2023 with a strong level of enrollment—twice the number of members we had, pre-pandemic. Ideally, the goal will be to double the enrollment again, a level that will facilitate even more opportunities. To that end, with the assistance of Suino Sensei and his Michigan SEO Group, a sophisticated and ongoing Google Ad campaign has been initiated.

In the coming year, there will again be multiple weekend seminars with Suino Sensei and JMAC, here and in Ann Arbor, as well as a *taikai*-style event for iaido students of Suino Sensei, planned for March in Ontario, Canada—our first international road trip. One of our road trips to JMAC will be in June, to help celebrate their 17th anniversary.

Online and in-person (Philadelphia) seminars with Salahuddin Muhammad Sensei are planned for February and March.

We’re preparing to install a stand-alone video conferencing system in the hardwood floor, auxiliary training area, to support the potential start of a study group training in Goju-ryu karate.

Sometime in the summer, Bailey Sensei has suggested that we take a van to Edgewater, New Jersey, to spend an afternoon at the Mitsuwa Marketplace (mitsuwa.com), a Japanese mini-mall of all kinds of shops and restaurants.

Finally, a major renovation/improvement project will be undertaken: Replacement of our worn-out tatami mats, over the installation of a fully-sprung, floating subfloor. This initiative is currently in negotiation with Fuji Mats and the credit union used by the dojo.

I’m eternally grateful for the members, instructors, and friends that have supported the dojo through all the changes of the past few years, and I look forward in great anticipation to what the future holds. 🌀



Robert Wolfe, chief instructor of Itten Dojo, began martial arts training in 1975 while attending Bucknell University, where he earned a degree in Japanese Studies. Mr. Wolfe has taught since 1985, and founded Itten Dojo in 1992. His articles on martial arts have been featured in publications such as *The Bujin*, *Budo Shinbun*, the *Journal of Asian Martial Arts*, *Bugeisha*, *Aikido Today Magazine*, *Inside Karate*, *Martial Arts Training*, and *Martial Arts Professional*.

