



Sensei Long practices Buddhist meditation in his Kingston, Pa., martial arts school. ALL PHOTOS BY EARL & SEDOR

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[sensei]

RANKED AMONG
THE WORLD'S TOP
MARTIAL ARTISTS,
CARL LONG SUSTAINS
SAMURAI TRADITION

By Kim Bower-Spence

A BASTION OF ANCIENT JAPANESE SAMURAI tradition lies just across the river from Wilkes University in Kingston, Pa.

There, in a martial arts school called Sakura Budokan, a globe-trotting Wilkes music education graduate and one of the world's leading practitioners of samurai sword fighting trains not only locals but students from around the world to wield a 3-foot steel blade – or a wooden stick for the less advanced – in the same way samurai warriors did centuries ago.

Carl Long '78 is the senior-most student of grand master Masayuki Shimabukuro and the highest-ranked member of their type of samurai swordsmanship in the world. He holds a fourth-degree black belt in jodo (JOH doh), which uses a short staff; a sixth-degree black belt in iaido (ee EYE doh), or sword fighting; and an eighth-degree black belt in karate. Together Long and Shimabukuro provide martial arts training and workshops to instructors throughout the U.S., Canada, South America and Europe.

Long and Shimabukuro are international appointees for iaido by the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai International (DNBK), the headquarters for traditional martial arts in Japan under supervision of the grand masters in each art and presided over by a Japanese prince.

“Sensei Long is extremely important in the world of martial arts – yet he is very modest and down-to-earth,” explains Dale Bruns, Long’s student and dean of Wilkes’ College of Science and Engineering.

From Rural Musician

Long began formally studying karate at age 12. A native of rural Huntingdon Mills, Pa., he also learned to play trumpet and majored in music education at Wilkes College.

Upon graduating, he married, taught elementary music in the Northwest Area School District and started a martial arts school. He opened Sakura Budokan in 1979 in a small Kingston storefront for which he paid \$80 per month. At the time, it was a novelty.

As his family grew to include two sons, he took a job managing a manufacturing facility and continued to teach martial arts. Interest in martial arts exploded in the mid-1980s with release of movies like *The Karate Kid*. “The martial arts school continued to grow and grow and grow, and I had to make a decision which way I was going to go.”

In 1989, he devoted himself to martial arts full-time. Long’s organization bought a former wholesale flower warehouse in 1994 and converted it to a *dojo* (DOH joh) — a place for experiencing one’s self.

Sensei Long demonstrates aikido with his student Jeff Kozel.



Sakura Budokan, with classes in karate, aikido (eye KEE doh) and sword, has had up to 225 students. Currently, about 160 people practice there. About 20 percent are under 18 years old. The oldest student is 68. Long estimates that he's taught hundreds of Wilkes alumni over the years.

In the dojo, Long is referred to as *sensei* (SEN say). The term means "one who has gone before" and refers to teachers. In 2004, the Japanese royal family gave Long the title *renshi* (REN shee) an old Japanese nobility title meaning a pure and uncovetous person — a rank similar to knighthood. Today the title is a teaching credential.

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– Del Lucent '03

“In the modern approach to martial arts, these titles/ranks are much more difficult to achieve than the conventional *dan* (black belt) grades and are not automatically assigned with rank or seniority,” explains Bruns. “The holder of these titles must also have made significant contributions to the martial arts community at large.”

The average student attends two times a week, with some traveling from New York or Maryland to train weekly. In November, Sakura Budokan hosted a seminar for 35 international instructors.

Worldwide, Long counts 5,200 to 5,300 students. As an accredited representative of DNBK, he trains trainers throughout the world, so their students are counted as his.

Japan's imperial family oversees training and licensing of martial arts. Each spring the DNBK hosts a 10-day festival in Kyoto, Japan, in the country's oldest martial arts hall, which goes back 800 years. A Japanese prince oversees the celebration, which includes four days of demonstrations and training.

“Representatives of our style have to go there and perform for the imperial family to show that we're carrying on the tradition,” Long says. In 2008, Long's team, which included Bruns, took the first-place award overall. Long himself was awarded *Yushu Sho* (yoo shoo SHOH), recognizing overall outstanding performance out of 1,100 participants, from Prince Higashi Fushimi, a member of the Japanese royal family and chairman of DNBK.

Karate to Swords

Long started in karate and then discovered aikido, which means “way of harmony.” Beyond self-defense, he explains, aikido seeks conflict resolution through seeing situations from the opponent's perspective. Rather than resist an opponent, an aikido master moves in the same direction as the attacker. Once you've “blended” with the adversary's motion, the master can move to immobilize or subdue an attacker. “It had tremendous application to everyday life,” Long says, from sales to family relationships to raising children.

As Long delved into aikido, his interest grew in the ancient “empty hand arts” practiced by the samurai warriors more than 200 years ago and then to swords. Karate and aikido, while based on samurai arts, are considered modern martial arts. Those who practice and keep alive the ancient martial arts of the samurai are considered national living treasures in Japan, he says. The master sword teacher, now 88 years old, is the 20th generation to teach a style of sword fighting that is 475 years old.

Iaido is performed with a real sword. Individual performances include choreographed movements that look like dance; more than 340 routines mimic situations in which a swordsman might find himself. Long also performs two-man sparring drills and target cutting with a live blade. Error can

mean a nasty cut, he notes.

Repetition leads to mastery, Long asserts. In the martial arts, mastery comes only from a lifetime of practicing one's art. “I don't think perfection ever comes.”

Self-Examination and Self-Actualization

Long likens the sword to words, which used as a weapon cut deep and can't be taken back. Iaido “teaches people to be more respectful, more empathetic toward other people's feelings, understanding that for every action there will be a cause and effect,” he says.

Self-examination leads to self-actualization as the practitioner understands the reason he does things. “People need to take more responsibility,” he asserts. Once they take responsibility, they must take more control of their actions. He adds, “Our society has lost an awful lot of cultural etiquette, and I think that's where we can have one of the greatest effects with the young people we work with.”

The philosophical lessons stuck with Del Lucent '03, who started studying karate with Long when he was 5 years old and moved on to study samurai arts. A doctoral student in biophysics at Stanford University, Lucent keeps his swords and staffs near his desk in the lab so he can practice late at night when everyone else leaves the building.



Long's office reflects the Japanese culture of his teachers.

As a teacher, Long knows when to be kind and when to be firm, Lucent says. “Whenever Sensei was hard on me, it was usually obvious that he was trying to help me succeed,” he says. “Also, Long Sensei would always emphasize martial arts from a holistic perspective. It is not enough just to have good technique. One must also understand the history and philosophy of one’s martial art in order to properly apply it to life.”

Lucent appreciates Long’s references to the dojo as “life’s laboratory.” “He always said that in the dojo and in martial arts we learn that the most important opponent we face is our self.”

Lisa Kadlec, assistant professor of biology at Wilkes, has studied with Long about three years. “Among the many things I value about Sensei Long are his extensive knowledge of the martial arts and his true passion for what he does. He is

extremely skilled, and I feel like I learn something every time I’m on the floor with him.”

Bruns and his oldest daughter began studying aikido with Long in 1996. Though his daughter has moved on, Bruns continues to train with Long in aikido and jodo. “Aikido techniques are based on relaxation and being centered – both physically and mentally – so this was of interest to me from a philosophical perspective.”

Inside the Dojo

Visitors to Long’s school enter another culture. “I wanted to create an environment here that was very similar to the environment of my teachers in Japan,” he says.

Tucked along a side street, a wooden fence shields a compact Japanese garden out front. Inside the gate, an oriental garden

complete with gurgling fountain and pond leads to the door of the one-story brick building.

Award certificates adorned with Japanese calligraphy decorate the light wood-paneled walls of Long's office. Sliding rice-paper panels cover the windows along one wall, while Long's father's pipe collection decorates a shelf.

A spacious, bright room with beige carpet, mirrors and a rack of wooden swords is where students practice. A Shinto altar consisting of a shadowbox of artifacts hangs from one wall. It represents the enshrinement of knowledge passed from teacher to student.

A scroll of Japanese calligraphy declares *jikishin kore dojo* (jee kee shin KOR ay DOH joh), or "true learning takes place in a pure heart." The alcove where it hangs also holds a vase of cut flowers. Though fresh, Long explains, the flowers are in a state of dying. That reminds students that they must appreciate life.

When new students come in looking to learn a martial art, Long tries to discern what they want from the experience. "I encourage them to try several classes of each art so they can decide which they'd best like to do," he says.

Those interested in learning conflict resolution while getting physical exercise would steer toward aikido. Karate attracts younger students, those looking to learn self-defense techniques or interested in sport. Sword work offers a more philosophical art and a cultural connection.

Once they enter the dojo, students leave the outside world behind. As they dress alike and work in unison, they transcend social and economic boundaries along with racial and sexual biases, Long says. "It's a level playing field."

That playing field includes some with physical limitations. Long has worked successfully with amputees and wheelchair users, as well as students with Asberger's Syndrome or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, who benefit from the training's emphasis on focus.

International Influence

Long teaches around the world, from Central and South America to Asia and Europe. He goes to Japan about twice a year. "My passport's pretty well-stamped," grins Long, who reads and speaks Japanese. Two years ago, he traveled 42 of 52 weekends. Last year he was gone only about two weekends a month. He credits his liberal arts education and the exposure to cultural diversity at Wilkes College with helping teach a young man from rural Pennsylvania how to relate to people from all over the world.

Long also works with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration to train its agents, embassy security, local drug enforcement agents and Interpol agents. He teaches arrest, control and disarming techniques for police and paramilitary personnel.

His efforts also include humanitarian work, including an educational foundation in Central America. A two-day martial arts demonstration in Costa Rica raised \$8,000 for a drug rehabilitation group to build a new facility. "I've seen severe poverty, I've seen what education can do," he says.

Long is now turning his attention to writing about martial arts. He writes a column, "The Cutting Edge," for *Black Belt* magazine. In 2007, he and Shimabukuro co-authored a book titled *Living Karate*. The pair have also produced books and videos marketed worldwide. And Long has been asked to write about the sword art for westerners.

Neither of his two grown sons, Christopher and Nicholas, took an interest in martial arts, but he notes that he now teaches some of the children and grandchildren of his first students. Wife Marguerite has been doing martial arts since 1979.

"I now have a responsibility. Five hundred years of generations of people have preserved this for me and have taken the time to pass it along to me, and I'm now a steward of that," Long says. He calls martial arts "a living, breathing entity. When you stop doing it, it no longer exists. It's got to be passed along, my teacher says, 'heart to heart.'"



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