

AQMAI: More Than Just a Belt

By Jeanne Cotroneo Darrow



The AQMAI (Anthony Quatrochi's Martial Arts Institute) dojo on Route 9 in Wappingers Falls offers Pee Wee, Junior, Adult, senior and women's self-defense programs.

Owner and lead instructor Anthony Quatrochi is a ju-jitsu practitioner who instills its life-long physical and mental benefits in his students.

Like many kids in the 1970s, Anthony Quatrochi idolized Bruce Lee and how he'd take down the bad guy in action movies. "He was like a superhero to me," says Anthony, who lived in Pelham, where there were no martial arts schools at the time. At 18, when his family moved to Dutchess County, he finally could take the classes he'd dreamed of attending. He had thought he wanted to learn how to fight, but it turns out that he really wanted to learn "how to avoid fights in the first place and, if forced, to end the fight quickly." His training gave him the confidence to do that—and much more. "I ended up gaining peace through strength," he describes. "It's not pride and arrogance you gain through training, but the ability to carry yourself differently, which others notice and can keep you safe."

Studying martial arts also brought him lifelong friends. "My martial arts school became my family," says Anthony, who tried a dozen different styles before training with a ju jitsu practitioner who would change his life. In just one class with that teacher, he realized that ju jitsu—a Japanese martial arts system of close combat—was the style for him. "It's the art of movement and a philosophy in which you give 100 percent," he describes. "The physical and mental training stays with students for their lifetimes, especially the character and integrity it builds, not to mention the health benefits of flexibility and balance."

Today, as head instructor and owner of Anthony Quatrochi's Martial Arts Institute (AQMAI), he teaches ju jitsu in what he calls an "ego-free" atmosphere, where you never are made to feel intimidated while training. Ko Koro Kai, as the AQMAI style is known, is "never about the muscle; you don't have to be able to throw someone or step into class being fit or coordinated," explains Shihan Quatrochi, who admits he wasn't at first. "Our goal is for all students to become focused and self-disciplined with the utmost respect for themselves and others."

A LIFE SKILLS INSTITUTE

For more than 20 years, AQMAI has been the area's premier martial arts center. A proud winner of several Best of the Hudson Valley awards, AQMAI is also a second family to students of all ages and abilities. The bright and welcoming dojo on Route 9 in Wappingers Falls houses a 2,200-square-foot, fully matted training area. It is also a proud showcase of the skills learned and fun to be had by students aged 4 and up. (Several current Black Belt students are in their seventh decade!)

From Pee Wee to Junior, Adult and Senior programs and onto Women's Self-Defense classes, what also sets his institute apart is its focus on real-life experiences rather than competitions. "We do training that's practical," he says. "We don't memorize forms or compete against each other or

other schools. You don't get promoted for simply coming to class. Every promotion is earned, and it's not quick or easy, but we let kids and adults know that we will be there to support them every step of the journey."

In time, many students come to their Shihan for recommendation letters for jobs, college applications and similar needs. Hopewell Junction's Brian Pompa is one of them. For 14 years, he and his brother Anthony attended classes at AQMAI, which he described as "a second home where you can train and have fun with good people and enjoy the sense of community." Now living out of the area, Brian feels good knowing "I can defend myself" and "how much it helped me mature," citing several valuable life lessons, including self-control and awareness. "Wherever I am, I know how to be in the safest position possible."

NO LONG-TERM CONTRACTS

Shihan Quatrochi extends his "Dutchess Dojo" in ways that make it a family experience, with students and their guests taking part in game nights, hikes, rafting trips, Halloween parties and annual fundraisers like the Polar Plunge for Special Olympics and the Plane Pull for the American Cancer Society. There are no long-term contracts to hold you in attendance. Many have been students for 10+ years, and Anthony has personally trained all of the instructors, who began as students themselves.

Hopewell Junction's Georgeanna Wellman, an instructor for seven years, started on the mat at age 7. "I fell in love with AQMAI after watching my little brother take classes," says Georgeanna, who was promoted at age 11 to the GOLD (Guidance On Leadership Development) Team. "By the time I left for college, I was teaching classes at night as a second-degree Black Belt. Studying ju jitsu—and being trained how to teach—taught me how to work hard, improve myself and others and reach a goal." Today, the elementary school teacher attributes her confidence, understanding and respect for people and relatability largely to lessons she learned on the mat. "AQMAI shows you firsthand that no matter your size or situation, you can always thrive, especially in the areas of self-defense and self-esteem."

Both Georganna and Brian encourage everyone to give AQMAI a try. "You'll build friendships and feel like you belong, you'll be the happiest you've felt in a long time, and it will further you as a person," says Brian. I can confidently say my life would be drastically different had I not gotten involved at Quatrochi's."

To learn more, visit AQMAI.com, email aqklkj@gmail.com or call 845-298-2177. Shihan Quatrochi and staff warmly invite potential students of all ages and situations to try a class. Safety is needed by everyone, and at AQMAI, self-defense is the focus. ♦



AQMAI focuses on ego-free practical training and real-life experiences rather than competitions.

AQMAI members become family, often partaking in fundraisers together. See our Calendar of Events for information on blood drives and other community events.