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## Herkimer man exceeds expectations in Martial Arts

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By Julie McCaulley

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Tashi Nathan Morris demonstrates the cutting motions used in the art of Batto-do.

By Julie McCaulley  
Evening Telegram  
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Herkimer, N.Y. -

Iaido is the Japanese art of drawing the sword and cutting in one smooth motion. Called by some the path of the Samurai, it is deeply rooted in the rich cultural traditions of feudal Japanese society. The samurai class was abolished in Japan in 1867 when the Meiji Restoration redefined the class structure, bringing Japan into the modern era. To many people, the samurai are, at best, a footnote in history, or a movie screen sensation, but in recent years, men and women both in Japan and around the world have

dedicated themselves to resurrecting the spirit and the traditions of the samurai warriors.

The art of iaido is less well known than its more popular counterpart, kendo (which is called "The way of the sword" and emphasizes sword fighting styles), but is gaining popularity both in Japan and around the world. It differs from kendo in two main ways: All sword techniques in iaido begin and end with the sword in the scabbard, and more fundamentally, iaido is not a sport, it is considered a "koryu," or a traditional art. Its goal is to teach practitioners how to handle and use the Japanese sword to deadly effect. The training is serious, always mindful of the art's lethal foundation. It is steeped in the traditions of the samurai, and the cutting techniques utilized require an extreme discipline and focus by students of the art. In many ways, it reflects the ritual and ceremony that have been a part of the samurai tradition for more than a thousand years.

The American Martial Arts Institute in New Hartford is the home of the Takenouchi-Hangan-Ryu-Matsuno-Crandall school of iaido. A portion of the iaido training at the institute includes the practice of the traditional Japanese sword art of Toyama-Ryu Batto-Do. This art is based on the practical applications of the sword as a weapon. It consists of basic cutting techniques, basic kata, advanced two man kata and a variety of very specific cutting patterns. Its practice places emphasis on the actual cutting and understanding the intricate details of the sword. While the art focuses on the physical aspects of every action and motion involved in using the sword, it also emphasizes the mental discipline and spiritual meaning of the traditional art, and teaches that these aspects are as important for the student who is to truly understand the sword and its use. Takenouchi-Hangan-Ryu-Matsuno-Crandall headmaster Clifford C. Crandall, Jr. has been offering instruction in this art form to his students as part of the iaido training process. Headmaster Crandall has trained with the sword for over twenty-five years. As Grandmaster and founder of the American Martial Arts Institute, he also teaches the "American Eagle Style" empty-hand martial arts. Headmaster Crandall has been working with Nathan Morris for more than twenty years, guiding him along the disciplined path of martial arts training. For the last fourteen of those years, Morris has been training in the art of iaido. Last year, he turned his focus to the mastery of the art of Batto-do. During this time, Headmaster Crandall was contacted by Master Fumio Demura to have one of his students participate in the 8th Annual Batto-do/Iaido Championships, which were a part of the 38th Annual International Karate-do Championships, in Costa Mesa, California. Fumio Demura is a well-known name in the world of iaido and Batto-do. His extensive training and disciplined life of martial arts practice has earned him the rank of Master. Part of his career has included doing the martial arts segments in place of actor Pat Morita in the "Karate Kid" movies. His name is honored among students of iaido and Batto-do, and to be invited to participate in the competition is a high honor in itself.

Morris, a sixth degree black-belt, had earned the rank of "Tashi" three and a half years ago. Tashi means expert student, a high ranking in the iaido echelon. Crandall selected Tashi Nathan Morris to participate in the competition, which took place on the weekend of Feb. 21-22. Morris placed third in the Batto-do Kata division, while taking first place in the Batto-do Cutting Competition. "His performance and etiquette at the competition set him apart in the United States among some of the most traditional Japanese stylists in the area of Batto-do," said Crandall, "Nathan has brought recognition and praise to his art, and in the world of Batto-do, he has put Central New York on the map. As

his Headmaster, I am very proud of Tashi Morris.”

Morris took top honors in the cutting division of the competition after having trained in the art of Batto-do for only a year. Training for this competition occupied a great deal of time for the full-time carpenter, husband and father of three. Logging more than thirteen training hours every week, his training honed both his skills and his focus. “The key to sword work is getting to the place where the sword becomes a part of you,” said Morris, “With enough training, it becomes a tool of the trade...an extension of oneself.” He has used his sword training as a template with which to build his life. “I have learned that actions with a sword are final,” he continued, “And it has helped make decisions in the real world.” His experiences have made him an ideal Tashi, one who has had two of his own students achieve their first-degree black belt.

He credits the support of his wife Melissa as a key to his success in the world of laido. “She has been unbelievably supportive throughout the past 14 years,” said Morris, “And now she also trains in laido, and so do our children.” Serenity, 8, and Brady, 5 have begun classes in martial arts, but 10 month-old Jillian will have to wait a few years before starting her training. “Nathan’s success has really opened the doors for others who are interested in learning the art of Batto-do,” said Headmaster Crandall, “The focus on harmony and balance, combined with the lack of intense physical action makes laido and batto-do ideal for mature individuals.” For more information on participation in the laido training program contact Headmaster Crandall at the Takenouchi-Hangan-Ryu-Matsumo-Crandall School of laido at 768-1859.

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