

# Local samurai's kendo spirit

BY PAUL H.B. SHIN  
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

KEEPING ALIVE the martial traditions of the samurai has been a life-long labor of love for Shozo Kato — a devotion that doesn't take a break even for the dog days of summer.

Kato, 50, is one of the highest ranking U.S. practitioners of kendo — a form of fencing descended from the swordsmanship of feudal Japan. The immigrant from Hiroshima recently celebrated the 20th anniversary of his dojo, Shidogakuin (www.kendoka.org).

Even on the most sweltering of days, Kato and his students can be found working up a fierce sweat — dueling with bamboo foils under their traditional armor and uniforms at their dojo near the UN headquarters in Manhattan.

"Kendo is not just about training the body, but the spirit also," said Kato, an art photographer by day. "Until high school, I did kendo because it was exciting, because I wanted to win. But after I met [high-ranking] sensei, I saw that kendo is also an art."

In New York and across the country, kendo has seen a steady rise in membership, with recent spikes in interest in the wake of such movies as "The Last Samurai" and "Kill Bill."

And though A-list stars Tom Cruise and Uma Thurman may have amped up the glamor of Japanese swordplay,

Kato's beginnings as a kendo instructor here were far from glamorous.

In the early days, finding a space to practice was a challenge because potential landlords were often scared away by the stomping and shouting required in kendo.

The noise even caused a brush with the law a few years after Kato opened a dojo at 21st St. and Sixth Ave., when neighbors called the cops after hearing the screams of one of Kato's female students — an opera soprano with a powerful set of pipes.

Kendo is great exercise, but its deep appeal lies in its sublime mental game that draws heavily from Zen philosophy, said Debi Farmer, a former personal trainer and graphic artist who has been a student of Kato's for 12 years.

"It's about timing, with an understanding of the weapon. Power and speed are only going to last when you're young," said Farmer.

Kato is one of only two American instructors who holds the rank of seventh dan — or seventh-degree black belt — in both kendo and iaido (pronounced ee-EYE-doh), a companion art in which practitioners learn how to draw and cut with a katana, the traditional Japanese sword.

In kendo and iaido, the sword is a tool of self-refinement rather than a weapon, Kato said. "The sword makes people's lives happy," he said.

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JAMES KEIVOM DAILY NEWS

Martial arts master Shozo Kato (left) explains the finer points of samurai swordplay to a student in kendo at his dojo on the East Side.

# B'klyn's Dem chief in 17G scam, sez DA

PROSECUTORS SAY they have uncovered evidence of more crimes by Brooklyn Democratic boss Clarence Norman — including allegations that he deposited nearly \$17,000 in campaign donations into his personal bank account.

Although Norman is not getting hit with new charges, prosecutors want to present evidence of the alleged bad acts to jurors if the political powerbroker decides to testify at his upcoming corruption trial.

Norman allegedly pocketed six checks totaling \$16,900 between 1999 and 2001 that were supposed to be deposited with various Democratic clubs or reelection committees, according to a court document filed by Brooklyn Deputy District Attorney Michael Vecchione.

Norman also allegedly put the arm on a lobby group, the New York State Association of Service Station and Repair Shops, to pay expenses his reelection campaign owed to a printing company. Norman's lawyer Edward Rappaport said Norman denies the allegations and vowed to fight to keep them out of court.

Jury selection is scheduled to get underway on Aug. 29 for Norman's trial on charges of accepting about \$10,000 in unreported campaign contributions to avoid state donation limits.

John Marzulli

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