

Korean-Karate Organization Celebrates Silver Anniversary

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By the mid-1970s, huge inroads had been made to spread the Korean martial arts throughout the United States. Academies had opened in all the major cities, and satellite schools had popped up in many smaller locales. The membership rosters of several organizations grew rapidly, and they allowed their instructors and students to earn rank, obtain internationally recognized certificates and receive advanced training.

However, there were few organizations from which to choose. The existing ones promoted only their own style, and some were in the middle of changing their forms, rank structures and procedures. Others had abandoned self-defense and switched to a competition-oriented format. Whatever organization you belonged to, you were expected to conform to its methods and ideals—including adhering to any current or future changes—while giving unwavering loyalty to its hierarchy.

While such groups helped the majority, significant numbers of martial artists wanted something different. “Many of us felt controlled by our organization, and we were at

Dr. Jerry Beasley founded the American Independent Korean Karate Instructors Association in 1979.

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the mercy of the few who were in charge,” says Jerry Beasley, a professor at Virginia’s Radford University and a veteran teacher of *taekwondo*. “We had absolutely no freedom to do the things that many people today take for granted, like adding boxing-type punches or kickboxing techniques to our curriculum.

“It was also very expensive, especially when it came to *dan*-level promotions. It cost a lot of money for a first-dan advancement and much more for higher levels.

“Additionally, there was too much politics. If you didn’t have a big school and weren’t sending in enough money, you weren’t given equal treatment.”

Beasley decided to create an organization that he himself would want to join. In 1979 he founded the American Independent Korean Karate Instructors Association.

AIKKIA was originally the name of the black-belt club at the university where Beasley taught. In the early days it was a regional outfit, but before long people in other states started inquiring about this group that supported instructors and allowed them to run their programs as they saw fit. That’s when he decided to go national, and he shortened its name to the American Independent Karate Instructors Association.

Around that time, Beasley launched his melting-pot-of-

martial-arts crusade. "America is a melting pot," he says. "We adopt what is useful from other cultures and blend it with our ways to make our country stronger, which is like saying 'from many comes one.'"

"Martial arts masters from all over the world came to America for economic opportunities and to promote their styles. I argued that as Americans, we should be able to try different styles of taekwondo, karate or other combat methods, then pick and choose what is right for us as individuals. Independent means that a black-belt instructor is free to select skills from any style to make his art stronger. AIKIA was the first organization to promote this idea and offer an association based on it. Our banner became 'Independents in Support of Independents.'"

Many instructors needed advice about developing class plans, and because Beasley's doctoral degree was based in part on his research in martial arts teaching and curriculum design, it fit perfectly. "I spent many hours on the phone answering questions and helping people develop their programs," he says. "I saw my role not as how I could be their grandmaster but as how could I be of service to them."

Independent instructors also expressed a desire to network for the purposes of acquiring advanced training and sharing ideas. Beasley responded by starting his now famous Karate College, an event at which practitioners of

any art can train with the top masters on the planet, make new friends and discuss their views on the martial arts scene.

In 1983 Joe Lewis joined AIKIA as its training director, and 10 years later Bill Wallace came on board. What attracted those heavyweights was Beasley's no-nonsense approach to training. He made himself accessible, and he always answered phone calls and letters. He was helping the little guy.

Lewis and Wallace also liked two AIKIA slogans: "No politics" and "Rank should be an honor, not an expense." Beasley coined them in the early days and always strove to live up to their lofty ideals.

"I've promoted more than 3,400 black belts since I started, and I've never charged them for a dan exam," he says. "Money often gets in the way of objective evaluations—how easy it is to sign a piece of paper and collect \$500 or more. In AIKIA, skill and independence talk, and payments walk." ✕

About the author: Floyd Burk is a San Diego-based freelance writer and martial arts instructor with more than 30 years of experience. To contact him, send e-mail to floydburk@yahoo.com. To contact Jerry Beasley, write to AIKIA, P.O. Box 402, Christiansburg, Virginia 24068. Or visit <http://www.aikia.net>.

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