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Tai chi instructor teaches peace and balance at Asian-American Festival

By Jericka Handie Tulsa World Jun 22, 2019



Rick Thomas giving a demonstration at his Thomas Academy Tai Chi and Kung Fu school on Friday in Tulsa, OK, June 21, 2019. STEPHEN PINGRY/Tulsa World

StephenPingry/TulsaWorld

Asian-American Festival

Tulsa City-County Library's 17th annual event will be from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday at the Martin Regional Library, 2601 S. Garnett Road.




Regional Library, 2601 S. Garnett Road.

Rick Thomas began teaching in 1992 and later opened an

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academy for all ages and fitness levels to study traditional styles of tai chi. During the festival, Thomas and members of his academy will introduce audience members to tai chi moves and teach traditional styles.



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The festival will also feature interactive booths, arts and crafts, and food concession featuring traditional Asian cuisine. Mandy Durham, the festival's chairwoman, said the festival provides exciting opportunities for locals to experience different cultures and traditions. Events are free and open to the public.

Since he started training in martial arts, Thomas's outlook on life has changed. After graduating from college with a degree in psychology and social work, he turned to martial arts to relieve stress, and in it, he found peace and harmony, he said.

"It is fun and entertaining, but it provides cultural awareness," Thomas said. "The more we know about one another, the more likely we are to develop friendships."

For the past 17 years, Thomas and his students have performed in the festival to further encourage individuals to practice self-care through the relaxing art of tai chi.

"I found out that learning and practicing Chinese martial arts has helped more people than any book series I read in college," Thomas said.

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He now dedicates his time to educating and informing the public about the nature and benefits of using tai chi movements.

Thomas said tai chi is a low-impact martial arts exercise system that helps reduce stress and anxiety. It also helps increase flexibility and balance.

Durham said Thomas is great at explaining the benefits of martial arts, she said.

"I think he is great at articulating how these different practices can be beneficial to people that take them on either beginners or people who are already familiar with martial arts," Durham said. "He is great at explaining the mechanics and purpose of certain movements and then how it can benefit you as a practitioner."

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As the Tulsa community continues to grow, Durham said she wants to support cultural events like the festival.

“As Tulsa diversifies, I think it is really important to do everything we can to provide opportunities to reflect back the communities that we are serving and all that they are contributing to our city,” Durham said.

Because of the festival’s emphasis on encouraging friendship and understanding, Thomas plans to keep working with the festival to educate the community on Chinese martial arts, he said.

Featured video

An old landfill site breached by floodwaters along Bird Creek at Oxley Nature Center got a closer look by federal, state and city officials. They need to come up with a plan — one that might address more than just one breach site. One thing was clear, however. It won’t be a simple matter.



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Jericka is an intern at the Tulsa World. She is a senior at the University of Oklahoma, where she is majoring in journalism. She graduated from Jenks High School. Phone: 918-581-8366

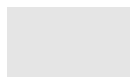
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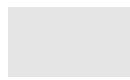
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