



6th Dan moves in to bring art of Aikido to young and old

A HIGHLY-respected Aikido Master has moved to Bexhill following years of training and teaching in the south east.

Sensei Paul Barker began learning Aikido in 1972, and is now a 6th Dan: he thinks there is no-one else of his grade in this area.

Paul has set up classes now at Bexhill Amateur Athletic Club, where organiser Jason Meek comments: "This is a quite a coup for us, and a great opportunity for local inhabitants to learn aikido from someone so highly qualified."

He has already been teaching in Sidley for five years, travelling down twice a week to personally lead the classes. Now he has moved from Essex to live in Woodgate Park, and is enjoying his new home town.

He claims Aikido is a gentle exercise class suitable for people from 18-80, whatever their fitness or ability.

"You don't need to be strong at all," he said, "It's nothing to do with strength. It is a non-violent martial art which teaches you harmony, and love and protection of all living things. It is not something you use to go bashing people with."

When he first began learning Aikido, he remembers the instant connection. "I was mesmerised by it - I thought it was incredible, the things you could do. Just by touching someone you could throw them on the floor and pin them down."

He explains it is all about balance, and using the force of the opponent.

"It is just refined to the nth degree - it is about using Ki, the universal energy, and it is soft like Tai Chi, but faster with a martial edge to it."

"I do Aikido all the time, its is more like a religion for me - kind of an answer to most questions - and much more than a martial art."

He takes the class at the Amateur Athletic Club on Tuesday evenings from 8pm-9.30, and Saturday afternoons from 1pm-2.30. He also runs classes focussing on Ki and Relaxation - helping students to improve their health and fitness through breathing, alignment and posture - as well as the womens self defence class he teaches in Our Lady of the Rosary Church Hall in Southlands Road on Thursday afternoons from 1pm-2.30.

These sessions are more about avoidance of dangerous situations than having to deal with them, thinking ahead and leaving a place if there is a potential threat.

"It's not to get out of trouble, but not to get in it in the first place. There are self defence techniques though for if you do everything I say, and still get attacked. I try to make people aware of situations before they arise. If you go to a bar and there is a fight 200 yards down the road, then you might think it won't get to you - but it might, so I say just leave. Don't get yourself into situations where you have to defend yourself. A lot of it is just common sense."

For further details call 07773 676539.