

# Tai Chi looking to make an quiet impact

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class. To get really good at this, I will stay at 15 form, which is the beginning structure of Fu Style Tai Chi," says Palmer.

Kirchoff also welcomes beginners that are willing to stay with the program and learn. His classes meet throughout the week for two hours, so students can further explore and learn the martial art form.

"We really embrace beginners. It's really difficult to learn. We focus on concentration and relaxation. These are opposing forces. But to be good at Tai Chi, you have to have both," said Kirchoff.

Tai Chi is an internal Chinese martial art form that means "energy" or "life form."

"We focus that art energy and learn how to move and help our bodies learn to communicate with each other. It's total body coordination. It is basic meditation in movement. It's dynamic meditation," says Palmer.

The Fu style of Tai Chi was started by Fu Zhen Song in China at the turn of the 20th century. Song was the No. 1 martial artist in China and never lost. He learned Tai Chi and another internal martial art form, 'bagua', and took the best of both forms to create the Fu style. When he died in 1953, his son, Fu Yong Hui, who had trained in the style for 40 years, carried on the tradition and taught his children. One of his sons, Victory Dragon or Grand Master Victor Fu taught Kirchoff the style.

Both Palmer and Kirchoff have found that within every class there are different levels and needs involved with each student. According to Kirchoff, one of the best parts of Tai Chi is that there is flexibility in the style, and it can be catered to each different student set. Both instructors cover the basics of Tai Chi, as well as the fighting elements, and then focus the class to best serve the students.

Palmer finds that most of his stu-

dents at the Park City Racquet Club are looking to learn how to relax through an alternative form of exercise. Tai Chi is based on balance training, relaxation and coordination. Every movement is slow, and the body is in constant motion. Palmer has found that many people are apprehensive about the class, because it seems too difficult.

"The biggest problem with teaching Tai Chi is they think it's complicated. So they make it complicated and get anxious and try to move too much. More times than not, the simple movement or answer is the correct one," says Palmer.

Classes are generally split into three parts. First there is a Tai Chi warm-up, followed by Eastern-influenced posture exercises, which teach students to tuck their tummies and point their tailbones downward. Finally, the class focuses on form, which is a choreographed sequence of movements.

According to Kirchoff, nearly 80 percent of Tai Chi students are women looking for a holistic health program.

"Tai Chi is a holistic health and fitness system. In the West, people exercise and work hard to become fit, as in losing body fat, so they look good. In the East, you work with your body to get healthy," says Kirchoff. "The Eastern philosophy is not fitness. They're working for health. Health is the primary factor. Fitness is a by-product."

Kirchoff recommends Tai Chi because it is a sustainable form of exercise. Students can practice Tai Chi until they are 100 years old, long after they can no longer lift weights or run a mile.

Tai Chi posture and movements are also applicable to other sports and activities.

"It makes everything work better and smoother," says Kirchoff.

With ski season starting, both Palmer and Kirchoff recommend it for people looking to get in shape for the slopes.

"Balance and strength helps with



PHOTO COURTESY OF TOMMY KIRCHOFF

**Skiers and teachers, from l to r: Sasha Rearick, Tommy Kirchoff, Grand Master Victor Fu, Adam Cole, Ted Ligety, Brian Friedman.**

falling. When you get scared, you tend to tense up. Tai Chi allows you to stay calm and have a clear mind. The relaxation helps you to regain balance and get back on your feet."

Kirchoff used the applications to skiing to take Tai Chi to the big time. Over the summer he worked with U.S. Ski Team members. A mutual friend connected Kirchoff with U.S. Ski Team trainer and Tai Chi enthusiast Sasha Rearick, who wanted the men to have a better foundation for their sport. Kirchoff started them off with beginning moves, but designed their program to be more martial arts-focused to keep their interest and also to allow for their high fitness level. He found that they learned the Tai Form much faster than the average person. Grand Master Fu also came and worked with them. Kirchoff said that it was very interesting to work with Western athletes. He found that they desired the relaxation aspects of Tai Chi as well as some of the movements that helped to loosen them up. Team member Erik Schlopy tried a waist-grinding movement one time and added it to

his permanent exercise regimen.

Kirchoff hopes to expand this program to teach other elite winter athletes in freestyle skiing, luge, bobsled and skeleton.

Esker and Palmer will be offering a demonstration class of general Tai Chi at the Silver Mountain Sports Club on Wednesday, Nov. 17 to generate more interest and disperse information on a program that they hope will grow in the area.

"I have such a high level of teaching, so I'm making it a huge thing. I'm not going to let it go," said Kirchoff.

Palmer, who is also a trainer at the Racquet Club, has found that the martial way of living has changed his life and hopes to give that to others.

"I have more of a love for living in a martial aspect. I bring that martial way of living into everything I do," says Palmer. "Basically, one of the first things I say to my students is that if you start the day with Tai Chi, it puts you in a great state of mind. If you start with Tai Chi, it's harder to stress yourself out during the day."