

The Isshinryu Way
Everything Karate & Kobudo

Isshinryu Worldwide

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Fall 2026

Train Beyond Your Walls

Last issue, I wrote about seeking challenges inside the dojo. This issue is about what happens when you carry that search out the door.

Every dojo has blind spots. We practise the same kata, with the same partners, under the same instructor, and we get very good at solving the same problems. That is the strength of a home dojo, and also its limit. Step onto someone else's mat and the problems change. A grappler doesn't care how crisp your Seisan is. A sword asks your footwork questions your empty hands never have. Suddenly you're a beginner again, and the gaps in your training show up fast.

The contributors to this issue went looking for exactly that, from Susan's training in Okinawa to Jesse Bongfeldt's groundwork in Thunder Bay to the Expo and the USIK seminar. None of it took anything away from their Isshinryu. All of it came home and made their Isshinryu stronger.

No one in our dojo lives this more than my student Jeff Long. Jeff trains and teaches at two Isshinryu dojos here in Thunder Bay three times a week, and he has added HEMA and Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu several times a week on top of that. This spring, he tested for Godan under Hanshi Mady. Jeff is also the editor of this newsletter, so I'll say it where he can't cut it: Jeff, your dedication is an example to every student in the dojo.

You don't have to train six days a week. Visit a friend's dojo. Take a seminar in a style you know nothing about. The techniques will sharpen your karate, but the people you meet will keep you training for decades. Start at the Martial Arts & Health Expo, May 21–23, 2027, and come be a beginner with us.

Train at home. Learn everywhere.

Upcoming Events

Events

Feb 2027—Scott Fawcett in Thunder Bay, ON, Canada

May 2027—Isshinryu Expo—Thunder Bay, ON, Canada

July 2027—Isshinryu Hall of Fame—Gatlinburg, TN, USA

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Essential Isshinryu is available!

For more information on the first Canadian Isshinryu book, visit www.essentialisshinryu.com!

Sharing is Caring

My First Trip to Okinawa

Susan Baldassi

I'd spent most of my life practising Isshinryu before I finally set foot in Okinawa in March 2026. I explored the island in the best company, with Scott Fawcett Sensei from New York and Jorge Suárez Sensei from Argentina. Both had travelled to Okinawa many times to train and experience the culture. They have good hearts, love martial arts, and are up for just about any adventure. Watching how graciously they treated people, I understood why the relationships they'd built over the years opened so many doors for us. People welcomed us into their dojos, and I was grateful to be part of it.

Yagi Sensei and everyone at the Meibukan dojo in Naha made us feel right at home when we joined them for Goju-ryu training. We especially enjoyed Kakomi Kumite, a prearranged five-person sparring drill that we later explored further at our own dojos. After class, I sent a few photos to our Winnipeg Isshinryu and Goju-ryu friends, Aric Dobres, Duncan Stewart, and Aaron Dubyts. "Do you know this dojo?" I asked. It turns out Meibukan is their Goju-ryu lineage, and Aric had tested in that very dojo the previous September!



Uechi Tsuyoshi Sensei welcomed us to his headquarters dojo in Okinawa City for a private Isshinryu lesson. He studied directly with Uezu Angi Sensei, Master Shimabuku Tatsuo's son-in-law, for 25 years. We worked on fundamentals, and when I asked him to watch one of my kata, he took the time to give me feedback. I appreciated hearing what he noticed in a form I'd spent years practising.

One of the visits I'll remember most was with Tokumura Kensho Sensei, a first-generation student of Master Shimabuku. We knew it was customary to arrange a visit in advance, but we hadn't been able to reach him, so we stopped by with a gift to pay our respects. He was pleasantly surprised to see us and invited us in.

Tokumura Sensei told us he was still a teenager when U.S. Marines came to train at Shimabuku Sensei's dojo. His teacher would ask him to show them some of the basics. He admitted that their size intimidated him, but he was even more afraid of how Shimabuku Sensei might react if



he said no! He still teaches and has both indoor and outdoor dojo spaces. It was a privilege to sit with him, ask questions freely, and hear those stories firsthand.

When we asked about his favourite weapon and kata, he named the bo and Tokumine no Kun. As he explained why, he sprang to his feet, took a bo off the wall, and showed us



My First Trip to Okinawa

Susan Baldassi

what he meant. The power he showed at 84 was remarkable.

We stood at two of Master Shimabuku's early training sites, paid our respects at his gravesite, and visited the grounds of Shimabuku Kichiro Sensei's Isshinryu headquarters dojo. We also trained in Ryukonkai Kobudo at the dojo of Iha Kotaro Sensei, whom Okinawa Prefecture recognized as a holder of an Intangible Cultural Asset for his kobudo. I was saddened to hear of his passing in October.



One of my favourite nights was in Uruma, just a short walk from our hotel, at the karaoke bar owned by Kochan-san, a first-generation student of Master Shimabuku. He toured us through his former dojo on the top floor of the building, where historic artifacts and certificates are still kept. Back downstairs, we sang "We Will Rock You," and all the locals joined in enthusiastically.

I loved meeting Hokama Tetsuhiro Sensei, a Goju-ryu master and calligrapher with a terrific sense of humour. At one point, he asked me if Scott had an AI chip in his brain because he knew so much about martial arts! Hokama Sensei's own memory fascinated me. Every artifact, document, and photograph he showed us in his karate museum brought another story to mind. When we asked him what it takes to live well into your later years, he told us to keep moving, talk to people every day, and have a purpose.

After we'd spent some time together, I asked Hokama Sensei to create a piece of calligraphy inspired by our visit. I loved how much he could say with such a simple message: *Keiko, keiko, keiko*—practise, practise, practise… and then, poof! POWER! It was one of my favourite things to bring home from Okinawa.

We found ourselves doing karate all over the island. At the Nakagusuku Castle ruins, we brought our gi and practised kata among the stone walls. We also visited the world-famous Shureido store, the Okinawa Prefectural Peace Memorial Museum, Shuri Castle, and Hamahiga Island. We took in cultural performances, and I enjoyed soaking in an onsen overlooking the ocean. I practised speaking Japanese whenever I could and learned a lot about local customs and etiquette along the way. Breakfast was my favourite meal,



and purple sweet potato ice cream became a daily ritual.

By chance, Tim Jurgens Sensei and his partner, An Chi, were in Okinawa at the same time, so we finally met in person after they'd finished training with Akamine Sensei. Two months later, Jurgens Sensei travelled from Minnesota to Thunder Bay to teach at our Expo.

I came home grateful for the training, the laughter, and the people who welcomed me so generously. Getting to know some of the people and places that shaped Isshinryu deepened my appreciation for what I get to pass on in my own dojo. If you've been thinking about visiting Okinawa, I highly recommend it. I'm already making plans to go back.

United Southern Isshinryu Karate (USIK) Seminar

Tim Boykin

On Saturday, October 3rd, 2026, Sensei Ray Reisen and Master Jon Oshita hosted a seminar at the South East Carolina Isshinryu dojo in Shallotte, North Carolina, sponsored by the United Southern Isshinryu Karate (USIK) association. The event ran from 10 a.m. to noon and brought together karateka of a wide range of ages and ranks.

The seminar was split into four 30-minute sessions, with instructors rotating and each session tailored to a specific age group and rank. It was also a chance to bring together mid-level black belts from USIK dojos across North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia. Junior black belts served as assistant instructors, which gave them a unique opportunity to work with youth, teen and adult students.

The seminar had two goals. For younger students, the focus was anti-bullying: situational awareness, communication and reporting, and conflict resolution, all aimed at building confidence and giving them options. For older students and adults, the focus was Isshinryu techniques for ground fighting, including defensive positions, movement and tactics.

Guest instructors included Grand Masters Mitch Kobylanski and Tim Boykin, and Masters Tim Cunningham, Butch McLaughlin and Justin Serpico.

Right after the seminar, families and participants gathered at the dojo for a cookout, with plenty of camaraderie, conversation and photos! Special thanks to Master David Heim for coordinating *and cooking* for the event. The food was a big hit with parents, families and participants alike.

Capping off an exceptional day, Grand Master Tim Boykin promoted Sensei Ray Reisen to Godan (5th Degree Black Belt).

Congratulations, Sensei Reisen!





A Weekend to Remember: 2026 Isshinryu Expo

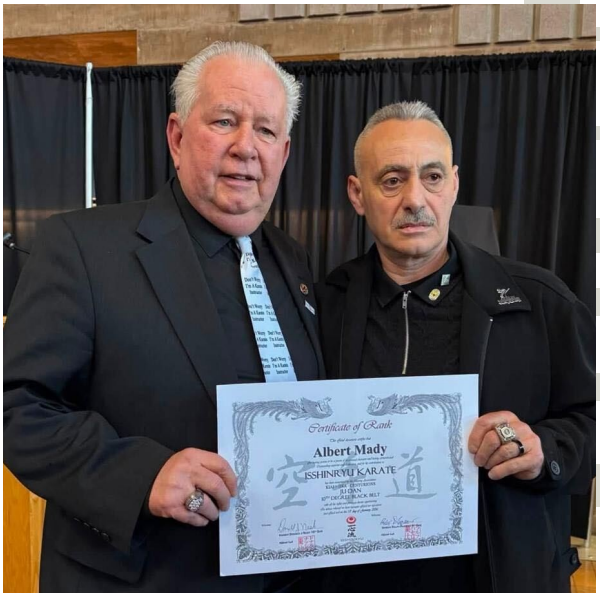
Susan Baldassi

From the sound of the gong at our opening ceremonies to an epic flash mob and a historic 10th Dan promotion, the 2026 Martial Arts & Health Expo gave us a weekend to remember. Participants from across Canada and the United States joined us at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay for martial arts seminars, hands-on health and wellness workshops, and our Youth Seminar Series. We also enjoyed a Historical European Martial Arts (HEMA) demonstration at our banquet.

Thank you to Jackie Chan for leading the opening gong ceremony and to Master Peng You for getting us moving with a Tai Chi warm-up. It was a wonderful way to begin the weekend together.

A huge thank-you to our international crew of presenters. You shared your experience generously, introduced us to disciplines outside our own, and gave participants of all ages something to take back to their dojos and daily lives. It was a pleasure to welcome back familiar faces and to have Julie Laurendeau, Sensei Tim Jurgens, Jesse Bongfeldt, and Master Don Nash join us as first-time Expo presenters.

One of the most moving moments was watching Master Don Nash present Hanshi Albert Mady with his 10th Dan. After 50 years as a black belt, Hanshi Mady became the first Canadian to attain 10th Dan in Isshinryu. It was a privilege to share that moment with him and with the community he's helped build.



Hanshi Mady also led the weekend's belt testing. Congratulations to everyone who stepped onto the floor and earned a new rank!

Gokyu—Jackie Chan
Sankyu—William Pettigrew
Nikyu—Evelyn McMahan
Nidan—Marvin Shell, Aric Dobres, and Duncan Stewart
Godan—Jeff Long and Mark Ceasar

Thank you to all the volunteers who made the weekend possible. A special shout-out to Sensei Mike Fenton, who spent months coordinating the belt testing, and to Sensei Tim Leonard, who helped candidates prepare. Thanks also to our Expo board members, Brandon Baldassi and Rick Wiljamaa, who start planning the next Expo with me as soon as we leave Lakehead.

So much of the work happened in ninja-like fashion. Sensei Brent Horton and the Winnipeg crew (Aaron, Aric, Bazil, Eugene, Duncan, Michelle, and Hailey) seemed to appear out of thin air every time my car needed unloading. With martial arts equipment, door prizes, Expo shirts, and testing clipboards to move, there was always plenty to do. I suspect they were also the cleaning ninjas in the lounge after our gatherings.

Michele O'Leary provided digital support, and she and Julie Laurendeau were up for whatever needed doing during the Expo and afterward. Deb Fuchek and Tim Leonard handled airport pickups and made coffee runs to keep Hanshi Mady happy and caffeinated. Tim even took a midnight airport run so I could get some sleep!

Hosting this non-profit event is a tremendous undertaking, but it's worth every bit of the effort. To everyone who came to train, try something new, or cheer each other on, thank you for bringing your budo energy to Thunder Bay. I appreciate you all!

If you'd like to get involved with the next Expo, let me know at susan@senseisusan.com. Whether you have a little time to spare, can help with social media from wherever you are, or want to lend a hand in person, we'd love to hear from you.

Chitora Dojo Promotions

Chitora Dojo Promotions

Chitora Dojo is happy to announce the following promotions.
Congratulations to all!

April 28th, 2026
Jarron Childs—Sankyu
Veeksha Tomar—Yellow Stripe

June 9th, 2026
Bernard Jacob—Yellow Stripe
Zion Jacob—Yellow Stripe
Rohan Mercado—Rokyu
Phelena Solenn Juan—Rokyu
Tobias Sedano—Rokyu
Rocco Quaresima—Rokyu







Gatlinburg 2026: Three Views from the Isshinryu Hall of Fame

Three of our contributors were at the 2026 Isshinryu Hall of Fame in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. Here's the weekend in their own words.

See You on the Balcony
By Susan Baldassi

Kata on the Gillette balcony. Bears during parking-lot practice. First place in kata with Sunsu. That was July in Gatlinburg.

Our Canadian crew included Norm and Tammy Rivard, Tim Leonard, Deb Fuchek, Rick Wiljamaa, Shannon Budiselic, and Dinah Jung, with Hanshi Mady and the rest of the crew just down the street. We kept up our yearly tradition of practising kata and bunkai on the balcony, and this year Master Carmona and others joined us.



On tournament day, I won my kata division with Sunsu and had a strong showing in the Grand Championship Final. I loved having a goal that kept me focused on my training all year, and it meant a lot to represent Hanshi Mady's Isshinryu lineage. I'm proud that we keep putting ourselves out there to see what we're capable of.

Shihan Norm Rivard took third in kata, and Sensei Dinah Jung took second in both kata and kobudo. At the awards banquet, Dinah was a finalist for three awards and won Outstanding Female Instructor. I was also thrilled to see Sensei Janet Fuchek named a finalist for her outstanding contributions to Isshinryu.



One of the great joys of Gatlinburg is seeing the icons of Isshinryu and reconnecting with people from all over the world. Isshinryu gives us common ground, and we have a ridiculous amount of fun together. This year we packed in trail walks, Hillbilly Golf, the mountain coaster, great dinners, and after-party karaoke. With this crew, the shenanigans are part of the tradition.

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Gatlinburg 2026: Three Views from the Isshinryu Hall of Fame

I'm already training for next July. See you on the balcony!

Gatlinburg Memories
By Tim Leonard

Deb and I rolled into Gatlinburg a day early for the Hall of Fame, and we made the most of it. Together with our Canadian friends, we putted our way through mountain mini golf, screamed our way down the mountain coaster, and laughed late into the evening.

On Friday, the IHOF opened with a full day of seminars. The highlight for me was watching Deb teach her own 20-minute lesson on controlling fear and harnessing the power of breath in self-defence. The room was focused and engaged, and I couldn't have been prouder.

Friday night, we dressed up for the banquet. Over a fantastic meal, we celebrated the achievements of Isshinryu karateka from around the world and honoured those who have helped shape and strengthen our style.

Saturday was tournament day, and Deb was unstoppable, taking first place in kata and second in weapons. I held my own with third in weapons and second in kumite.

And then there's our special Gillette Crew. The Gillette Hotel patio has become our outdoor dojo, an anchor that brings us together year after year. It's where ideas flow, encouragement is shared, laughter is endless, and friendships deepen. There's a certain magic in that space, where the spirit of Isshinryu extends far beyond the dojo walls.

We came home with medals, but the real treasures were the shared experiences, enduring friendships, and memories that will stay with us long after the weekend. IHOF, we will be back!

IKI on the Tournament Floor
By Rick Wiljamaa

The 2026 Isshinryu Hall of Fame was another outstanding gathering of martial artists dedicated to preserving and promoting the traditions of Isshinryu karate. The annual event brought together practitioners from across North America for a weekend of competition, camaraderie, and recognition of excellence within the martial arts community.

Members of Isshin-Ryu Karate International (IKI) were proudly represented, with strong participation from Thunder Bay, Windsor, Ottawa, and Calgary. IKI members competed in the tournament with determination and sportsmanship, representing their dojos and communities with distinction, both on and off the tournament floor.

Special recognition goes to Calgary's Kaminari Dojo, which achieved an impressive 100% attendance rate: both of its members attended and competed! Their commitment to training, participation, and supporting the Isshinryu community exemplifies the spirit of the organization. The weekend strengthened connections among IKI members across Canada, and the Kaminari Dojo team has already confirmed they'll return to compete at the 2027 Hall of Fame.





Jesse Bongfeldt Returns to Thunder Bay
By Susan Baldassi

We loved hosting Kenora's Jesse Bongfeldt in Thunder Bay this year. He taught fight-ready combinations in June, then came back in October for groundwork and stick training. A black belt in both Isshinryu karate and Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu and a two-time UFC competitor, Jesse has a gift for breaking down complex techniques so you can see why they work and put them into practice. We're excited to get back on the mat with him at the Martial Arts & Health Expo, May 21–23, 2027!



Expo 2027
By Susan Baldassi

Picture a weekend of training with martial artists from around the world, trying new practices in hands-on health and wellness workshops, and ending each day trading stories around a fire. That's the Martial Arts & Health Expo, coming May 21–23, 2027, to Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada, on the shores of Lake Superior. Feel the beat of live taiko drums in your chest, take part in cultural activities, explore the city on the Expo Bus Tour, and share a meal with new friends at the banquet. Whether you've spent decades on the mat, are stepping into your first class, or are drawn to the wellness workshops and cultural experiences, we'd love to welcome you. Email susan@senseisusan.com for details or to join our mailing list.



Hanshi Nick Adler, 10th Dan

The Isshinryu community lost one of its pioneers this summer with the passing of Hanshi Nick Adler, 10th Dan, director of Nick Adler's Centurions. For seventy years, he gave his life to the martial arts, and through his students, his dojos, and his example, he helped shape Isshinryu in North America.

Hanshi Adler began training in 1956, earning rank in judo and jujitsu before finding Okinawan Isshinryu. From 1962 to 1965, he trained in Isshinryu with Ed McGrath and Mel Sutphen. From 1966 on, he trained with two of the art's great teachers, Don Nagle and Angi Uezu Sensei. Uezu Sensei later awarded him Menkyo Kaiden, the highest teaching license an instructor can give. He also trained in kobudo, holding Kyoshi from the USKA and Renshi from Grandmaster Seikichi Odo. In 2009, Grand Master Harold Mitchum promoted him to 10th Dan.

Hanshi Adler didn't just teach students; he made teachers. He built Nick Adler's Centurions into an association of schools across several states, and many of his black belts trained with him for decades before opening dojos of their own. He taught as an adjunct professor in Long Island University's karate instructor program, and for years he hosted the "Samurai Spirit" traditional tournament each spring.

His dedication was recognized throughout the martial arts world. The Isshinryu Hall of Fame named him Instructor of the Year in 1984 and inducted him in 1988. His other honours include the East Coast Pioneer's Award, the Golden Lifetime Achievement Award from the World Head of Family Sokeship Council, induction into the OIKKA Hall of Fame, and the KIAI Legion of Honor for his work as an educator and motivator.



Many of us remember Hanshi Adler from the 2014 Expo, when he and Hanshi Marilyn Fierro made the trip north to train with us. He shared his knowledge with everyone who stepped on the mat that weekend, and it was here in Thunder Bay that he promoted Hanshi Fierro to 9th Dan, a moment we still hold with pride. Fittingly, one of his last acts as a teacher was to honour her again, promoting her to 10th Dan.

His legacy lives on in every student he taught, in every dojo his black belts opened, and in every student they will teach. Our deepest condolences to Hanshi Fierro, his family, and the Centurions family.

Rest well, Hanshi.

Hanshi Marilyn Fierro, 10th Dan

Before he passed, Hanshi Adler promoted his student of more than 50 years, Marilyn Fierro, to 10th Dan, making her the first woman in Isshinryu to reach the art's highest rank.

Hanshi Fierro has been a pioneer for women in Isshinryu. She began teaching in 1976 and opened her Smithtown, New York, dojo in 1978. In 1996, Hanshi Adler and Grandmaster Uezu promoted her to 7th Dan, making her the first woman recognized as an Isshinryu master on Okinawa. In 1998, she became the first woman inducted into the Isshinryu Hall of Fame. She has also shared her knowledge as a writer, with articles in *Black Belt*, *Official Karate*, and other martial arts magazines.

We were honoured to have her train with us in Thunder Bay, and it's a privilege to congratulate Hanshi Fierro on this historic achievement and on carrying her teacher's legacy forward.

About The Newsletter

Just as in our dojo training, the newsletter is about sharing and improving as a group. We regularly have contributions and updates from Quebec to British Columbia in Canada, as well as from Germany, New York and the Southern United States. Everyone is always welcome in my Dojo or to share via the newsletter.

Articles are welcome from anyone and everyone. They can be about anything related to the Martial Arts, a technique you think is just great; A better way to do a technique; History of a Karate Master; a tournament trick that works well; ANY-THING!

All articles are appreciated as e-mail. You can send it to your instructor to proof read and send in, or directly to me. (sensei@isshinryu.ca)

You can even include pictures if it helps your article!

Karate Terms

Renshi - Polished Instructor

Kyoshi - Expert Instructor

Seisan - Thirteen

Seiunchi - Control, Pull, Control / Calm within the Storm

Naihanchi - "(No one actually knows anymore)

Wansu - Wang Sifu / Teacher Wang

Chinto - Fighting to the East

Kusanku - Named for the Chinese Martial Artist/Emissary

Sunsu - "Strong Man" / Son of Salt

Sanchin - Three Battle

Use it or Lose it