

Samurai News from Honbu



Keiko... Hajime!!!



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Shinnen Akemashite Omedetou Gazaimasu

By Toshishiro Obata

On January 1st, 2004, the Honbu had two demonstrations, one in Weller Court and the other in the Japanese Village. Lou D'Agostino Sensei and his students from the New York branch and Victoria Van Fleet Sensei from Michigan participated in the demonstration. Lou Sensei participated in Kata, Tachiuchi, and Tameshigiri. Victoria Sensei participated in some Tachiuchi and Aikido free style. I had some 20 students come to my house afterwards and try some traditional Japanese New Years food.

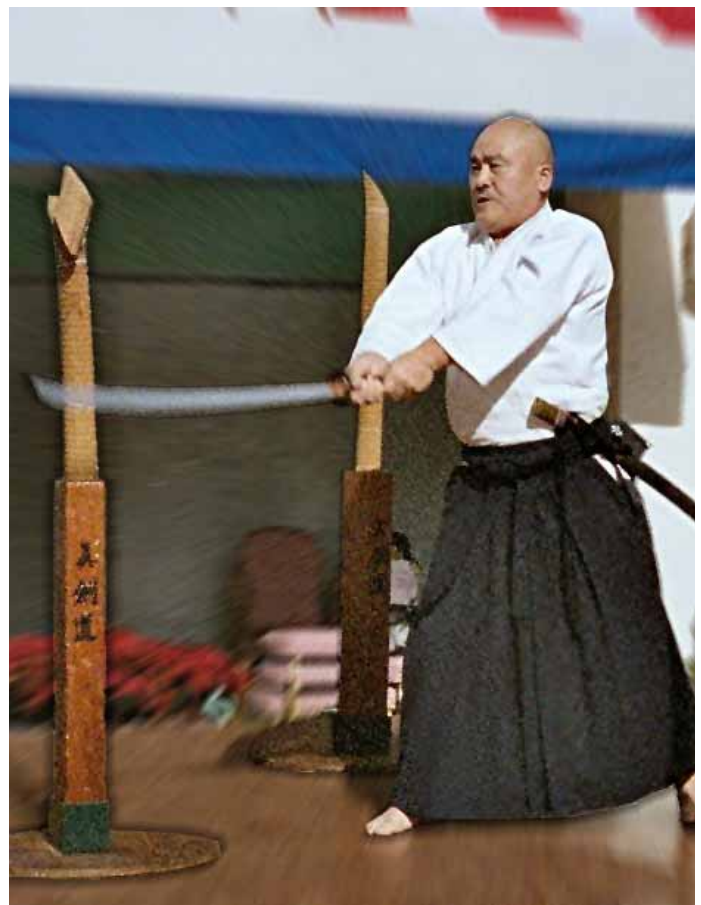
Keiko Hajime was organized by Saito Sensei, and thanks to him, many students were able to get a discounted price at the Miyako Hotel. I hope all the Keiko Hajime participants appreciate all the hard work he has done.

We had 47 participants in all at the first ever, Shinkendo seminar at the Honbu. The demonstrated area consisted of 40 regular Tatami mats and soft blue mats, but some of the students had to train on the concrete. We had a 2 hour lunch and dinner on Saturday at the dojo. I made sure that lunch and dinner were long so that fellow Shinkendo participants would be able to talk to each other.

The *Rafu Shimpō* newspaper wrote about our demonstration and seminar.

The Honbu would like to thank Kalila King and Jonathan King, no they are not married (haha), for their donations toward the new Honbu dojo.

Lionel Jones Sensei could not make it to the Keiko Hajime as he originally planned, so I had Nayef Smith Sensei take the *menjo* back as a *dairi*, or substitute. Please congratulate Lionel Sensei, he is hard working and very



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Nenmatsu no Osoji

By Nicholas Lauridsen

Saito Sensei brings the mop



In anticipation of the New Year and the Keiko Hajime, the Honbu Dojo held its annual *Nenmatsu no Osoji* – big end-of-the-year cleaning – at the end of December. The *Nenmatsu no Osoji* is a long-practiced Japanese tradition that originates from the Shinto sanctification of one's house in preparation for the New Year: By cleaning the house (from top to bottom), you will eradicate any bad luck from the previous year and start the New Year with a fresh mind and a fresh, clean space.

For the Honbu Dojo, the *Osoji* was a formidable task. Since proper *Osoji* requires that absolutely everything is cleaned inside and out, each part of the dojo was in effect disassembled, cleansed, and reassembled. The clean-up involved mopping the expansive floor, washing the mats, sweeping, washing and rearranging the furniture (down to wiping each individual pane of the four or five *shoji* in the dojo), designing and assembling the new dressing rooms, and even deploying James and Bamm to Home Depot with a piece of the rear dojo wall in hand to obtain color-matched paint for covering holes in the soft plaster. Certainly it turned out to be one of the most constructive Saturdays we have spent, and it has served to remind us of our duty to maintain and respect the dojo in which we learn our art.

Afterward, we celebrated all of our

hard work with the traditional end-of-the-year party, *Bonenkai*, which literally means “forget-the-year party”. Students and the Obata family all provided a variety of dishes, and after many hours of physical work, food never tasted better.

James having fun with the mop



It has been a great delight to see that more and more dojo are observing Japanese traditions – and there are definitely many to choose from. Making these traditions part of dojo life is an important way of rounding out our education, and it deepens our understanding and participation in the culture from which Shinkendo originates.

Sang discovers the power of Windex



Amongst Warriors

By Win Prue
Gilbert Dojo, AZ

I would like to take a moment to convey my experience at the Keiko Hajime seminar. It was my first time training at the Honbu dojo. The degree of skill displayed by the Honbu students was truly astonishing. Within moments of the seminar's opening I was awe-stricken -- the fluidity with which they moved, the precision of their technique, it all seemed so effortless. Needless to say, I was a bit intimidated, though inspired at the same time. I felt as if I was amongst warriors, amongst *samurai*.



The Gilbert Dojo with Obata Kaiso

As astounded as I was with the ability demonstrated by the Honbu students, my impression of Obata Kaiso was unparalleled. This was my second experience training under Obata Kaiso -- the first of which was back in March of 2002 during a seminar held at our Gilbert dojo. Both instances were amazing, though it was a different feeling entirely training at the Honbu dojo itself. Obata

Kaiso emanates a prowess I've never seen before. He is the embodiment of everything a warrior should be, completely devoid of ego or sense of self. It was an honor to be in his presence.

I found the event as a whole to be a great challenge, particularly the *senbongiri* exercise. Prior to the seminar, the thought of performing a thousand cuts was beyond me. Having lost count, I know I likely didn't achieve the objective of the exercise, but the intensity of it was still awesome. Every muscle in my arms ached, my hands were blistered, but I strove to continue. Obata Kaiso's energy gave me no other alternative. This was by far the hardest I've ever worked in Shinkendo, which made me realize just how much harder I have to work yet to attain my goals as a swordsman.

While I am not exactly new to Shinkendo, I am far from where I aspire to be where my skill is concerned. I came to Shinkendo out of respect and admiration for the Japanese sword and everything it symbolizes. However, through my training I have attained much more than what I first anticipated. The truth be told, I do not know where I'd be at this point were it not for Shinkendo. It has given me a sense of meaning I've never had before. I finally know what it means to be a part of something greater than myself or what surrounds me. I finally *belong*.

Fabian Sensei has taught us that within the dojo we can learn a great deal more than the way of the sword alone -- in fact we can learn to live. I suppose my license plate says it best: *Life is Shinkendo*.

My sincerest thanks and gratitude go out to Obata Kaiso for his dedication to the art, and for instilling within me the desire to further myself not just as a Shinkendo-ka, but as an individual as well. I aspire to deem myself worthy of his teachings. In addition, I would also like to thank everyone who made this seminar such a rewarding experience, sensei and student alike. It was truly an honor to be among you. *Domo arigato gozai mashita*.

My Extended Shinkendo Family

by Mary Giles Sensei
Mind~Body~Spirit Dojo, Norcross, GA

There are so many great things to say about my first training at Honbu, but the one that stands out most is how much the Shinkendo community is like an extended family. I've always felt my local dojo is my second family. We care about each other, we rely on each other, we work hard together, we have fun together....after 12 years of this, it's no wonder we all start to feel like one big family.

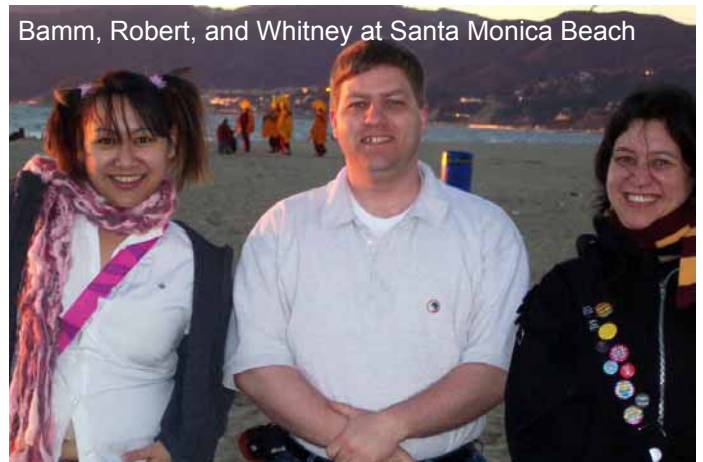
In fact, I had become so close to many of the students at Atlanta Budokan, it was hard to leave my old comrades and start my own dojo at Mind~Body~Spirit. But what I found out is that you never leave your family...you just start a new one and the family gets larger. Never was this as apparent as in Keiko Hajime, where more than 50 Shinkendo students from many different dojos got together as one huge extended family.



Mary relaxing in Hollywood

I felt right at home with everyone....which is more than I can say about my own biological extended family! I just want to thank my Shinkendo family for taking such good care of us. And special thanks to Whitney and Bam, who showed us around LA Sunday afternoon...from Hollywood strip to Santa Monica Beach. Watching the sun set over the Pacific Ocean was a perfect way to end our first family reunion.

Bamm, Robert, and Whitney at Santa Monica Beach



A New Year, New Horizons

M. Harris, Mesa AZ Dojo

I can't help but come away from the weekend's Hajime Keiko training with the sense that Shinkendo has rounded some sort of curve in its evolution and is headed towards some uncharted but very positive and enormously interesting horizons. There are myriad individual observations that lead me to this conclusion.

At the more localized end, there were the sentiments expressed by our students. Some were new to Honbu-style training (but appropriately forewarned! ☺) and some had previous exposure. But, all came away with provocative insights into themselves, the art, and what training is all about. Broadening the scope out a bit, there was the cooperative and amicable way that the rather "cloistered" branches of Arizona worked together on some of the unfamiliar material that was presented. The road to growth is paved by such cooperation.



Applying another turn of the lens for a yet larger view, the breaks in training were a moving kaleidoscope of spontaneous, friendly, and enthusiastic exchanges between participants from different parts of the country. This feature was consistent throughout the weekend, and most gratifying to witness. Fanning the focus out further still, the energy of the entire corpus while on the mat—from the least to the most experienced student—reflected a sense of renewed effort in training. The prevailing mood was that it was "just great to be there", to be involved, to be learning, to be growing in the art, and regardless of individual pace, position, or measure. Then there was the training itself, with fresh material woven into familiar fabric, and new spins put on older themes.

Taken separately, any one of these observations can be considered an enlivening experience. However, taken together, the spirit of Keiko Hajime can be interpreted as the benchmark of a potential upward spiral. It is our hope that the same momentum built by this inspiring event will be preserved and nurtured in 2004 and beyond.



Samurai Art Seminar: Shinkendo

by Lou D'Agostino



Obata Toshishiro Kaiso
Performing "Shiho Barai"

Photo By Lou D'Agostino
Effect By Michael Shu

The close of 2003 and the start of the New Year were an excellent opportunity to learn and improve with the samurai art of Shinkendo, thanks to the efforts of its Kaiso (founder) Toshishiro Obata, his family, and the International Shinkendo Federation Honbu (headquarters) students, and instructors. Keiko Hajime (New Years Training) was held at the new

Honbu Shinkendo dojo located in "Little Tokyo" Los Angeles, California. Student's traveled from Arkansas, Arizona, Michigan, Georgia and our group from Queens, New York to attend. Our three day seminar began on Friday, January 2nd 2004 and continued throughout the weekend, concluding on Sunday, at noon. Over the course of the weekend, we would undergo nine hours of intense and highly enjoyable training encompassing all five structures of the vast Shinkendo curriculum. Shinkendo is composed of the following main points or structures which encompass the heart and soul of the samurai's education in the Japanese sword.



Nicholas (left) and Saito Sensei

Suburi - sword swinging exercises.

Batto-ho - learning how to draw and re-sheath the sword safely, and correctly.

Tanren-gata - forging kata, instructing the student in proper implementation and integration of the sword and body. These kata; designed by Obata Sensei are utilized to swing the sword safely while sliding, stepping and turning.

Tachiuchi - arranged sparring exercises designed to teach real methods of samurai swordsmanship.

- Since we do not score by hits, armor is not necessary. Safety comes first at all times, however. The goals of point scoring are replaced with learning practical and tactically sound technique. Our ultimate goal is self-improvement through the learning process.

Tameshigiri- test cutting. Targets materials used are: tatami-omote and bamboo.

- **Fruit and vegetable cutting are strictly prohibited in Shinkendo**



Migi Kesa-giri

These rules are followed and enforced for the safe and dignified use of the Japanese sword.

Although nine hours only allowed us to scratch the surface of what is possible to learn in Shinkendo, it was a great work-out and education. In reality nine seconds can test one's spirit when working directly with Obata Sensei due to his ability to challenge any student's level of development. This is the true heart and character of a true master who can instruct any student regardless of their level of experience.

My interest in Shinkendo began several years ago, when I began investing in my martial arts library, obtaining any publication available by Obata Sensei. All this began before starting any study of the sword, simply for appreciation and education.

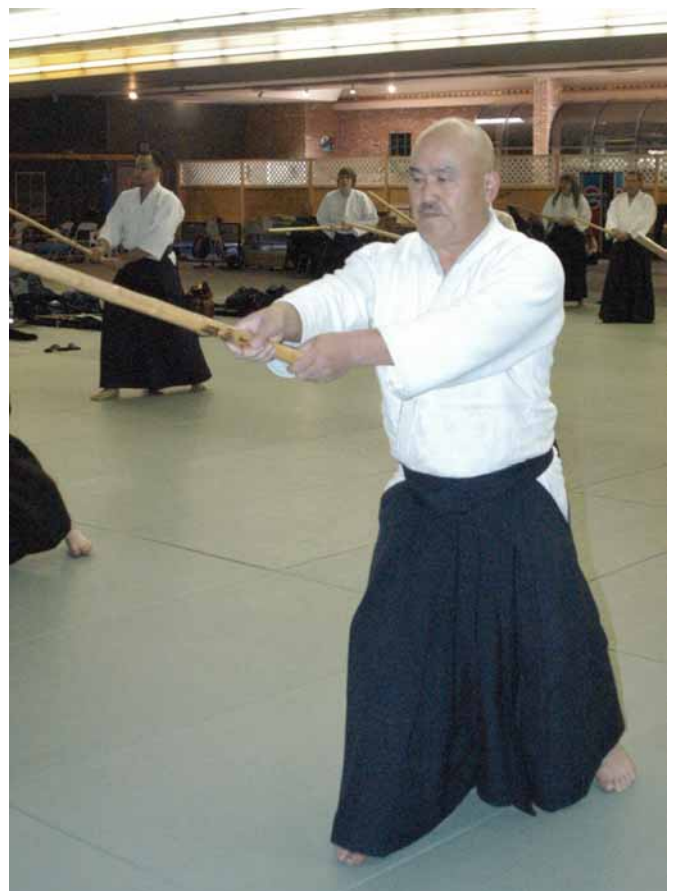
I had an immediate first impression from just looking at Mr. Obata, that he had a lot of knowledge to share and was a force to be reckoned with. In time from various sources and research, my initial impressions were proved accurate and correct.

I had been fascinated by Japanese culture since childhood. In 1970 a seed was unconsciously planted by my father who took me on a trip to Japan to attend the Worlds fair held in Osaka. I was eleven years old at the time and my father and I were traveling in Asia for a period of one month, spending the majority of that time in Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto and Hiroshima.

During this visit I had the good fortune to witness martial art demonstrations that left a life-long impression upon me. However since beginning my music studies and later a career in music, my martial art journey began much later in life.

In 1999 I had the good fortune to attend a Shinkendo seminar and observe Obata Sensei and Shinkendo first hand. It was a life changing experience that has resulted in profound positive influences upon my life that I am very proud of.

Since that fist meeting and seminar, I have followed Obata Kaiso and the Shinkendo way, traveling to many parts of the United States and on one occasion to Europe, in order to learn and refine my understanding of Shinkendo.



Along the way I have met many fine people through the International Shinkendo Federation, sharing and enjoying much. To be associated with a martial artist of Mr. Obata's ability and samurai lineage in modern times is an honor and privilege, as well as a rarity. One can only "experience" this out on the mat firsthand with mind, body and spirit.



As a relative new comer, I try to take advantage of any opportunity to take training with Obata Sensei. I decided that it would be a good idea to arrive two days prior to the new years training to get some extra practice. This turned out to be good fortune on my part for a couple of reasons that would become apparent after my travel plans were completed.

The first, was two Shinkendo honbu demonstrations scheduled in "Little Tokyo for New Years Day. The second, was learning that Obata Kaiso had received new swords for our members which were ordered to his recommendations and specifications months before. *(more on the swords soon)*

A traveling student or instructor visiting the Shinkendo Honbu, for practice will usually be paired with a senior Honbu member. Yoko Obata (daughter) offers a unique perspective of Shinkendo and Obata Sensei and has proven to be invaluable in assisting traveling members. In addition to her Shinkendo skills, Yoko Obata is an excellent translator of esoteric principals, and philosophy, that Obata Sensei wishes to share.



This visit was no exception and I was the better for it. I departed New York on Tuesday evening December 30th in order to take practice on Wednesday morning and afternoon, December 31st. During this practice three students also accompanied me. My wife and two additional members of our NY Shinkendo branch

dojo arrived on New Years Eve.

At the conclusion of our practice I accompanied Obata Kaiso to his home to obtain one of the new Shinken pictured above.

A Shinkendo student is not allowed to use a Shinken until a safe level of proficiency and ability is attained. One must also receive permission to engage in unsupervised tameshigiri, by their instructor or Obata Kaiso directly.

After a short break for tea and discussion, it was back to the Dojo. Obata Kaiso was holding a practice session for the next days New Years Demonstrations. I found out I was to participate in one of the demos (surprise). I never had the opportunity, honor or privilege to participate with Obata Kaiso and the Honbu and was a bit apprehensive. Adding to the stress factor was Yoko-san's casual statement; "My father says to perform tameshigiri". Although we



are thoroughly prepared for this, it was still stressful as I would be sharing the same stage as Obata Kaiso and the Shinkendo Honbu. Talk about being humbled. Whew!



I was very tired from four hours of practice, but it was very exciting to get a glimpse of what was to take place for the demo as well as the skills of the participating students. During practice it was decided I would partner with Yoko-san for tachiuchi.

The day beckoned brightly, with clear skies and crisp air. At Eleven O'clock the festivities began with official proclamations a sake cask being opened, Taiko drummers, mochi cakes and more. Many local women were adorned in beautiful, kimono, the men in formal hakama, etc. It was very exciting and fun to behold.

One must always consider the safety of the audience at all times when using a shinken.

The Shinkendo demo began and was fantastic, with all students performing admirably. The highlight was Obata Kaiso performing "shiho barai" a traditional tameshigiri ceremony where one cuts in four directions to

symbolize the New Year, cutting off ties to the past. The cuts represent the four directions of the compass, North, South, East, and West. It was a very moving ceremony. I learned that this is traditionally performed when a new structure is to be built, or a foundation to be laid. It was majestic in its presentation. A narration was provided by a Shinkendo honbu member and was positively received by the audience.



Obata Kaiso concludes the New Year Purification Ceremony

Towards the end of our seminar, Obata Kaiso instructed us in how



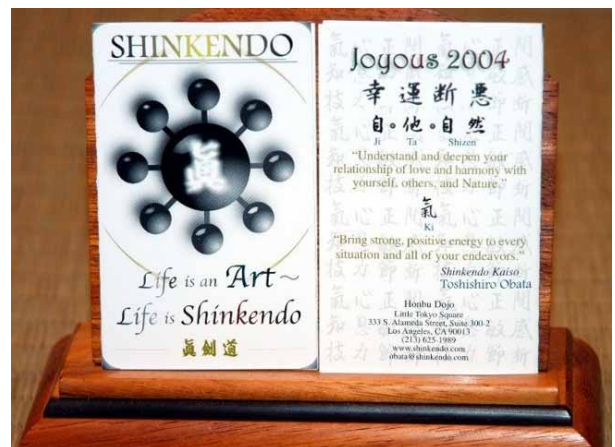
to implement the Shiho barai format for Shinkendo demonstrations at our home dojo. Kaiso stressed proper stage manners, etiquette and also how to integrate Toyama-ryu, Shinkendo Batto-ho and Tanren-gata seamlessly. The result is a beautiful presentation that is fun to perform and observe.

Afterwards, Shinkendo students and their families helped to pass

out 2004 Good Luck New Years greeting cards that Obata Kaiso had provided. I believe we passed out 1500 cards! Best of all everyone was looking forward to receiving one.

In less than two hours the next demo would commence at another location in "Little Tokyo" This was on a smaller stage with the audience much closer to the performers. A challenge, but not a huge obstacle. However safety is always our primary consideration.

This demo was really fun for the participants and audience. The previous mornings demo was limited to about 15 or 20 minutes, however at this location, we had as much time as we desired, which turned out to be about 45 minutes at least.





Michael Shu (Left) and James Huang Performing Toyama Ryu Battojutsu



Obata Sensei's Bamboo Tameshigiri

tameshigiri. All went off without a hitch. I had a great time cutting with my new Shinken on New Years day with Obata Kaiso and my fellow students and instructors. It was an immensely joyous occasion.

Obata Kaiso - Enjoying Tameshigiri

The highlight was Obata Kaiso and Tameshigiri. He was amazing! The audience was in awe of his demonstration that was very, powerful, yet extremely understated in its presentation. Sensei was having a great time even smiling at one point, which was most memorable. Students and their families who never witnessed Sensei perform Tameshigiri

All participants did very well, from novice, intermediate, and advanced students ranks. It was really nice to see all members participate. From basic level kamae, batto-ho, tanren-gata, tachiuchi and advanced



were anticipating the event. They were left slack jawed, staring at each other in amazement. I have witnessed Obata Kaiso perform tameshigiri many times, yet I too was mesmerized.

After the demo, all students were invited to the Obata residence for a delicious traditional dinner cooked by Mrs. Obata, Yoko-san, and Obata Kaiso. The sake, relaxation and socializing were most welcome.

Over the course of the next three days of training we accomplished a great deal and came away with a sense of gratification and joy. Everyone was motivated to return home and get right back to training. At the close of training on Sunday the nearly fifty participants were separated in to two groups for “endurance” suburi. **1000 swings!** This is quite a task under any condition, however after three days of intense training it was a good test of forging the spirit!

The first practice of 2004 and Samurai art seminar was a tremendous success due to Obata Kaiso and his vision. Slowly, but surely, Shinkendo is spreading domestically and internationally. At the time of this article there are approximately sixty Shinkendo branch dojos throughout the world.



Thank you Obata Kaiso and the International Shinkendo Federation!



A Step Above the Limit

By Michael Sorek



When I entered Honbu Dojo and saw Kaiso for the first time, I told myself to expect everything that I was told to take a while to sink in. The morning before the first session, we visited Hawley Library and I saw a video of Kaiso test cutting. His speed, control, and focus amazed me. I wanted to have that kind of control also.

The first night of training was much more than I have ever seen, and even though I was confused with some of the exercises that we were doing, I was enjoying myself during the training. At the hotel that night, I felt that I had entered into something that would completely change my life. On Saturday I was expecting to work harder than I ever had.

I woke up on Saturday morning and after a good breakfast I left for training. The training that we did in the morning was not as hard as I thought it would be. After lunch is when I was really tested beyond my limits with the new information we were given. There were so many new things to learn I could not keep them straight in my mind. At the end of the training Kaiso had us do one thousand cuts. I don't know how I was getting the energy to continue. After the training I was surprised that I was not too tired to stand up, even though my body was telling me that I should be collapsed on the floor due to sheer exhaustion.

I feel that the experience I had at Honbu was for my benefit and I feel that by going I have passed beyond my own limits and have become a different person. I have seen the results of this in my weekly training by the way I work and in the more focus I have. I also have felt an inner peace that allows me to concentrate on my technique and blade stopping more than I ever have. The Honbu trip is one thing I would gladly do again.

dedicated (he has never missed any of my seminars in Alabama, Georgia, and Arkansas), he truly deserves this Kyoshi rank.

Nathan Scott Sensei received the rank of Aikido 5 Dan and Kyoshi, and received 6th Dan in Toyama Ryu at the end of last year. He is the leader of the Tsuki Kage Dojo in LA, and has assisted me on seminars in New York, Arizona, and Georgia in the past. He has been helping me tremendously with updates, paperwork, and organization.

After the Keiko Hajime, Jack Hilton from Arizona and Victoria Sensei trained for an extra week. The second week, Jim Stratton from the Atlanta Budokan in Georgia stopped by to train for 5 days in Aikido and Shinkendo. I had Mr. Stratton take back *menjos* to Shawn Forristall Sensei from the Atlanta Budokan and Nayef Smith Sensei. They received the first Bojutsu rank of Shodan and have been training very hard for 3 1/2 years.

This year is the 10th year of the International Shinkendo Federation, and the pyramid of the system has changed. I suggest all instructors to apply for promotion, please e-mail me for more information.

- Branch instructors, please make sure you have received the 2004 good luck cards, if not please let me know. Also, annual reports are due at the end of January, please write down the name of all the students (with starting date, rank, etc).

NEWSLETTER STAFF

PUBLISHER

OBATA TOSHISHIRO KAISO

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

MICHAEL C. SHU

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

NICHOLAS LAURIDSEN

WIN PRUE

MARY GILES

MARLENE HARRIS

LOU D'AGOSTINO