

Baltimore Sun, Anne Arundel County Neighbors column
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Next Saturday, at 10 a.m., hundreds, maybe thousands of people living on Eastern Standard Time will slowly raise their arms, breathe deliberately, and call on their inner life force. Like a giant stadium wave rippling around the globe, practitioners of Tai Chi and QiGong will perform their ancient art for World Tai Chi/QiGong day—beginning in New Zealand at 10 a.m. local time and following the sun as the clock strikes 10 in succeeding time zones around the world. In Annapolis, the wave will pass through Quiet Waters Park.>

“It’s a way to expose people to different styles [of QiGong and Tai Chi],” said instructor **Kimberly Kelly-Rigsbee** who organizes local participation in the event. Rigsbee said over 40 people joined her last year in Quiet Waters despite a cold rain. A variety of teachers will lead different demonstrations and group sessions for people of all levels, even those who’ve never heard of it before.>

Many Americans may be familiar with Tai Chi and QiGong from television depictions of slow graceful exercises performed in parks by groups of elderly Chinese. Practitioners, however, describe it as much more than just exercise. To highlight its powerful healing capabilities, the founder of World Tai Chi/QiGong Day, Kansas-based Bill Douglas, scheduled the event for Saturday because it follows the United Nation’s World Health Day.>

Practicing Tai Chi and QiGong “is a way to strengthen and nourish chi” said Rigsbee, “the vital life force” that everyone possesses. Through their practice, Rigsbee said they strengthen their chi and exchange energy with the world around them. But according to one of Rigsbee’s students, **Risa from Annapolis**, “The student does not need to embrace the Chinese philosophy of chi to benefit from the practice of QiGong. He or she just needs to practice. The results are learning to relax your body, open your heart, and take an active role in your own healing and well being.”>

Risa knows what she’s talking about. “I had developed some complications during surgery that left me with serious breathing difficulties,” she said. Her physical therapist recommended QiGong to improve her breathing and help manage the pain and stiffness of degenerative disc disease and osteoarthritis.

“My very first class with Kimberly was like a miracle,” she said. “I did not feel the constant pain I have lived with for years, and my breathing was eased.” According to Risa, QiGong changed her life.>

And she is not alone. “I came to this with fibromyalgia, and I had trouble walking in the beginning,” said **Leslie Julian of Temple Hills**. Although she’s only 43, Julian was forced to retire from teaching three years ago because of the debilitating effects of fibromyalgia. Now, she said, after a year of QiGong, she’s able to bike ride and exercise

on a treadmill. “I start everyday with QiGong and end everyday that way,” She said. “Fibromyalgia doesn’t have me anymore. Honestly it’s a really simple thing that’s really changed my life.”>

Although she lives in Prince George’s County, she drives to Annapolis once or twice a week to take Rigsbee’s QiGong classes. “I’ve found, basically, we kind of get scattered in our every day lives, and QiGong has a way of reconnecting us with ourselves and folks around us,” she said. “It’s so hard to explain to people the feeling of lightness and relaxation.”>

“One thing that really impresses me,” said **Tom Wetterau of Annapolis**, “is when I’m through practicing, I’m energized and relaxed at the same time.” Wetterau has been practicing off and on for two years. “I haven’t had any real problems, and I approached it because it seemed like a sensible thing to do in our stressful 21st Century Lives,” he said.>

As an Advertiser with her own Agency, **Amy Halsted of Annapolis** was searching for just that kind of sensible thing when she found QiGong a year ago. “I was struggling with some things at the time, and QiGong was the perfect thing for me when I needed something to get me out of myself.”>

Halsted said she sometimes practices down on the fishing pier near her Cape St. Claire home. Bystanders are often drawn in by the sight. “Sometimes they just stand there mystified,” she said. “It’s very beautiful to watch.”>

Rigsbee agrees, and says she welcomes people to come on Saturday even if they just want to watch. “In the watching there’s also this chi exchange,” Rigsbee said.>

Halsted remembers World Tai Chi/QiGong Day last year. “There were some people watching from the periphery who just couldn’t help themselves,” she explained, “they just had to join in. They were absolutely taken in by what was going on.”>

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