



NWMAF September 2020 Newsletter

News for Our Members, Friends, and Supporters

"Empowering women and girls to achieve personal and collective strength, safety, and well being through martial arts, healing arts, and self-defense education"

Events - Updates on 2021

By Natalie DeMaioribus, NWMAF Events Coordinator

Yes, even though we JUST wrapped up our virtual classes, we are already looking ahead to next summer. We plan to accept trainer applications from September 8 through October 26, making our decisions by the end of the year. Please help us recruit more and more amazing, diverse trainers! Expanding and improving our offerings is a group effort - check out our short guide on [how to approach a trainer you don't know that well](#), and then go ahead and reach out to your biggest hero... what do you have to lose??

Next: a new and improved schedule! All day Wednesday will be devoted to the usual early programming (professional development classes focusing on trauma-informed pedagogy), and regular classes will run all day Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, culminating in the performance as a celebratory closing event. There will no longer be any classes on Sunday, to give people time to travel and/or socialize (or to take a quick side trip to Niagara Falls!). We are also working on securing an amazing keynote speaker for ALL attendees on Wednesday evening, to kick things off with a bang.

Finally, we are introducing a [new volunteer structure](#). The help we need is broken down into specific, time-bound tasks, so you know exactly what you're committing to and how long it should take. Plus, we've added new roles, and in return we're offering several thousand dollars worth of registration credit! So take a look and start signing up!

Current needs (by September 30):

- Fall trainer liaison (up to \$200)
- Trainer selection volunteers (\$200 each)

Finally, thank you to all who participated in our virtual camp this summer, especially our wonderful trainers. You can still register through November in order to get access to the recordings. And don't forget to [give us your feedback](#) by September 15!

Looking forward to doing this in person next year!

From the Chair

By Cathy Chapaty, NWMAF Board Chair

My wife and I are preparing to remodel our kitchen and bathroom, and if we survive renovations still married, I'll consider that a win. Remodels in general are challenging for most relationships. Remodels during a pandemic amplify emotions.

Have you felt a bit more agitated lately? Feeling more heightened emotions than usual? If so, you're not alone. And I have some tools to share that may help ease your angst.

First, though, it's important to acknowledge that this has been a tough summer for many National Women's Martial Arts Federation (NWMAF) members—a tough year, in fact. Some of us have lost family, friends, classmates, and colleagues to COVID-19. Others have lost their schools as a result of closures and some suffered damage from riots. Many of us are struggling with the loss of community—of having to be at a greater distance from people we hold dear.

These are challenging times that call on us to examine what to do with all those highly charged emotions. Do we channel our energy toward racial and social justice work? Stand up for those who cannot do so themselves? Do we dig deep for clarity and serenity?

To be clear and fair, everything everyone is feeling right now is normal. There isn't a right or wrong way to live during a pandemic. But what do we do with all those heavy and strong feelings? Full disclosure: I've let anger and fear nip at my heels. It's affected my outlook on life.

Then something wonderful happened that shifted my mood.

It was mid-July, and the NWMAF had just begun its first Virtual Conference. Since we couldn't meet in person, we hosted sessions on Zoom. This meant members from across the country and around the world—from Israel to Germany to the Netherlands—could join us. I got to see faces I've missed and hear familiar voices. My spirit needed this connection badly.

But what really changed for me was attending a meditation session hosted by former Board of Directors Development Coordinator **Kyren Epperson**. It was a salve for my restless soul. I realized my meditation practice had subsided this summer, and Kyren's gentle, empowering, and reassuring nature drew me back to my practice.

It's funny: After meditating, the world doesn't change. However, my *attitude* and *outlook* on the world is different. I feel calmer and more centered, better able to see solutions to my problems.

Kyren gave me a precious gift this summer: a more settled spirit. And thanks to their gentle guidance, I will be better able to cope with any bumps in the road of life—or the kitchen and bathroom remodel.

Send any comments to chair@nwmaf.org.

Member Spotlight: Sensei Amelia Jones



This month, we're spotlighting Sensei Amelia Jones of Watanabe Dojo in White Plains, New York. Sensei Jones received the Hall of Fame Award (30+ years) from AWMMAI in 2016. Here, she gives us her origin story in her own words.

NWMAF Wonder Women: Our Origin Stories

It was a warm evening in Durham, North Carolina, in 1983. I was a young mother, recently transplanted from New York, making the adjustments to living as a Black woman in the South. I attended a film showing at the YWCA of "Kiai!" The images of Brooklyn Women's Martial Arts—in their black gis, ready and able to defend themselves—changed my life forever. Shortly thereafter I took my first step on the path that has become a lifelong journey.

After joining the NWMAF [in 2012], I attended my first Special Training at Edinboro University. More than a little apprehensive at my first foray into the wider martial arts world, I found myself in the company of the most awesome women. Meeting Annie Ellman, Nadia Telsey, and their students from BWMA was a peak experience.

Each subsequent camp felt like a trip to the battery charger, a transfusion of energy to nourish me throughout the year. In a class led by Maureen Brown I was introduced to the healing aspect of the martial arts, which subsequently changed my career path. While traveling in Africa, I had the good fortune to train in Tae Kwon Do with Master Cho Bong Nam, a trainer of Muammar Qaddafi's female bodyguards. Wherever I found myself in the world, the martial arts sustained me.

Fast forward to the present day. More than thirty-five years have passed. I've spent more than half of my life practicing the martial arts. This practice guided me to contributions beyond imagination. Serving as a role model for my family and the community, I taught self-defense in camps and in schools. Aspiring to a leadership role in the NWMAF, I have served as a health

care provider, instructor, and board member. In pursuit of the healing aspects of the martial arts, I earned a degree in Oriental medicine and am able to offer its benefits to underserved populations. As the highest ranking female student of Sensei Katsuo Watanabe, 8th dan Judo and 7th dan Aikido, I fulfill a leadership role in my home dojo. In the time of the pandemic, I and my partner have facilitated moving our aikido class into the virtual realm. I continue to develop the spiritual attributes of my martial arts practice in counseling my patients, friends, and loved ones.

In retrospect, the benefits of a life spent in the martial arts have been myriad. Perhaps the most valuable has been the knowledge of self-worth. The ability to persevere, roll with the punches, get up, and keep going after falling down. To know that with hard work over time you can transform yourself, again and again. And all along the way you will encounter the most amazing human beings, bringing you the most extraordinary lessons.

Milestones



Arlene Polite, longtime NWMAF member and student at Sun Dragon Martial Arts and Self-Defense NFP in Austin, Texas, died July 24. Arlene earned a belt in Kyokushin Karate in 1995 at Sun Dragon, and after taking a break from her practice while living in Florida for eight years, she returned to Sun Dragon in 2015. The school had switched to Seido Karate. Arlene held advanced green belt in Seido. Please be sure to read **Dr. Amelia Jones'** tribute to Polite below.



JB Ramos, a longtime student and teacher of Arnis through Combat Warrior Arts, was promoted to Master level by Grandmaster **Laura Armstrong** in August during a surprise ceremony. "She's been a beacon of leadership for our school," Armstrong said, praising Ramos for her inclusive mindset, "inviting people from all walks of life, no matter where they come from, to learn and train in Arnis." Congratulations, JB!



Sensei Karen Brown was awarded her 5th Dan in Ai Mute Shotokan on July 11, following a brief performance of some favorite forms and techniques. While the performance wasn't the same one she'd planned pre-COVID, she felt honored to be given the opportunity to take this next step in her martial arts journey.

Membership Notes

By Lauren Bailey, NWMAF Membership Director

At our 2019 Member Conversation in Naperville, many of you asked for a **regional member directory**. We're actively working on this now, but we need your help to make it the most useful it can be.

How can you help?

- Please log in to our website and make sure your contact information is complete and accurate.
- If you're not an active member and are interested in having access to the regional directory, please log in to our website and renew your membership. Only members will have access to this resource. Remember that we have a Reduced Cost Membership that's only \$25 for the year that is now *open and available to everyone!*
- If you're an active member and know for certain that you DO NOT want to be included in the directory at all, please email Lauren Bailey (members@nwmaf.org) and she will make sure you're omitted.
- Watch your inbox for an email in the coming months that will allow you to select which information you share in the directory.

The recent passing of Arleen Polite has inspired a new page coming to our website: **member memorial tributes**. If you would like to volunteer to write a memorial tribute essay (like the one Amelia Jones has written for Arleen in this newsletter), please reach out to Lauren Bailey. All submissions welcome. We're eager to make sure that all the members who've gone before us are forever celebrated and never forgotten.

In Memoriam: Arleen Regina Polite

By Sensei Amelia Jones



Though only 5 feet tall, Arleen Regina Polite was ferocious! She obtained her black belt in Kyokushin Karate in 1995 at Sun Dragon Martial Arts and Self Defense, NFP. She was their first black belt ever! After taking a pause in her martial arts practice while living in Florida for 8 years, she returned to Sun Dragon in 2015. When she learned that they had changed to Seido Karate, Arleen began to train for her second black belt.

Arleen was amazing from the start. Born in Palatka, Florida, the third child of Queen Ester Evins Polite and Hallbrook Polite, Sr., she was reading and drawing by the time she was 4 years old. During her elementary years, Arleen continued to hone her craft as an artist. She presented her first art show at age 10. By the time she was in high school, her art skills rivaled that of many trained adult artists. In high school she also was a cross country runner and a member of Future Farmers of America.

After finishing her two-year course of study at the Florida School of the Arts, Arleen moved to Atlanta and earned a BFA in 1984 from the Atlanta College of Art (now the Savannah College of Art and Design). There she discovered the ancient Chinese technique of block printing. A few years after graduating, she moved to Austin, Texas. She had found her new home!

Arleen and her art became hallmarks of the Austin art community. Her work was exhibited at numerous galleries throughout Texas, including the Austin Museum of Art, Flatbed Press, and La Peña in Austin; the Dallas Visual Art Center; and the San Marcos Fine Arts Center. In 2010, Arleen recorded [an hour-long interview at the University of Texas](#). In this interview, she reflected on what it was like to try to survive as an artist in Austin, and she spoke openly and honestly about her craft, her struggles, and her aspirations.

At the St. James' Episcopal Church in Austin, Arleen found solitude, love, and family. She was the church's resident artist, creating beautiful and moving images for its Stations of the Cross. This past Holy Week, early in the COVID-19 crisis, [an audio-visual meditation on the Stations of the Cross](#) was recorded with voices from the congregation set alongside her images. It stands as Arleen's own meditation on the struggle and journey of life, death, and resurrection.

Arleen's entire life was spent in service. From 1989 to 1990 she was a Peace Corps volunteer, stationed in the Philippines. When civil unrest broke out under President Ferdinand Marcos in June 1990, the US government received intelligence reports that Peace Corps volunteers were going to be targeted by insurgents. After weeks of chaos, the volunteers scattered. Arleen found refuge in the mountains with the Negrito people. When she miraculously received word of the Peace Corps evacuation, Arleen was shuttled to the departing plane by motorcycle.



Photo caption: L. to r.: Dr. Amelia E. Jones, Dr. Odette Russell, Arleen Polite, Dr. Darlene Defour, Dr. Germon Miller-Bey, Carey Johnson. Naperville, 2019.

It had been a number of years since Arleen had attended ST, but she was present in Naperville in 2019. One of her powerfully evocative images commemorates the 30th anniversary of Sun Dragon. I do have some of her woodcut work, and now I cherish it more. (If you are reading this, and you have any of her art, please let an NWMAF Board Member know. We'll post and share with our community.) An artist gives of themselves while they are here so that they continue to live with us in our hearts, minds, and memories long after they are gone. May she Rest in Power.

Arleen Regina Polite, January 17, 1962–July 24, 2020

Meet the Board: NWMAF Self Defense Coordinator

By Martha Thompson

I am the new NWMAF Self-Defense Coordinator. I've been an IMPACT Chicago lead instructor since 1988, a member of NWMAF since 1991, and an NWMAF certified self-defense instructor since 2002.

Since I officially became a Board Member in August, I have been contacting certified instructors and gathering ideas and thoughts about NWMAF and self-defense. I've heard so many exciting ideas about potential virtual and in-person sessions, mentoring and the certification process, thinking about the Model Course, ways to increase and diversify connections with other self-defense organizations and instructors, and so much more. I'll be sharing many of these ideas in future newsletters and you'll see their influence in future programming. I'm not limited to talking with certified instructors!

So, if you have ideas about NWMAF and self-defense, please contact me at selfdefense@nwmaf.org and we'll find a way to "talk" via email, Zoom, Whatsapp, or any number of other ways! I look forward to hearing from you.

Youth Program

Do you have questions, comments, or suggestions regarding improving the NWMAF's youth program? Whether you're a student, parent/guardian, or instructor, the NWMAF would love to hear from you. If you're under the age of 18 years old, please write an email (with your parent/guardian or instructor) and send it from their email address to youth@nwmaf.org.

Upcoming Board Meeting

The next NWMAF Board meeting is **September 27**. Board meetings typically take place on Sundays at 2 pm central time, via an online meeting site. If you are a member interested in attending, contact Cathy, chair@nwmaf.org, and she will provide you with log-in instructions.

Healing Arts Coordinator Search

Come join our team!

The National Women's Martial Arts Federation is looking for an awesome individual to become the Healing Arts Coordinator on the board of directors. Do you love all things healing arts? Do you want to be part of something bigger than yourself? If this is you, reach out! Email members@nwmaf.org

Call for Submissions

Have news and information to share with the NWMAF community?

We welcome your submissions of news, opinion pieces, fiction, or other writing related to our practices of martial arts, healing arts, and self-defense. We also accept art, photos, and comics! Our editorial board reserves the right to edit for space or content considerations. The deadline for the next issue is **September 24**, and will be approximately every four to six weeks thereafter. Send contributions to secretary@nwmaf.org.