

# *This* **Weekend** The Chronicle

SIT BACK, RELAX AND ENJOY THE READ

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*Toowoomba residents find relevance in tai chi training*

## Ancient Chinese art stands test of modern times



**BIGREAD**  
with Merryl Miller  
merryl.miller  
@thechronicle.com.au

TWENTY years ago, exercise was all about “the burn”.

We responded to Olivia Newton-John’s entreaties to get physical; donning ourselves in lycra shorts, headbands and leg-warmers and working out until it hurt.

But at around the same time as we sweated and burned in the name of health and fitness, a very different kind of exercise came to Toowoomba.

New for regional centres such as this, it was nevertheless a form of exercise dating back many hundreds of years and promising well-being without the pain.

It was tai chi – and Toowoomba man Lindsay Sheedy became one of its very first proponents.

“I guess back then, anyone who did things like tai chi was considered to be a bit of a hippy,” the St Ursula’s teacher of math and

science says.

“But I was attracted to the relaxation that tai chi could bring, and interested in holistic exercise that brought together the body and the mind.

“Going to the gym and working out might be some people’s thing, but I found I could get a real workout from tai chi, without putting any stress on my limbs.”

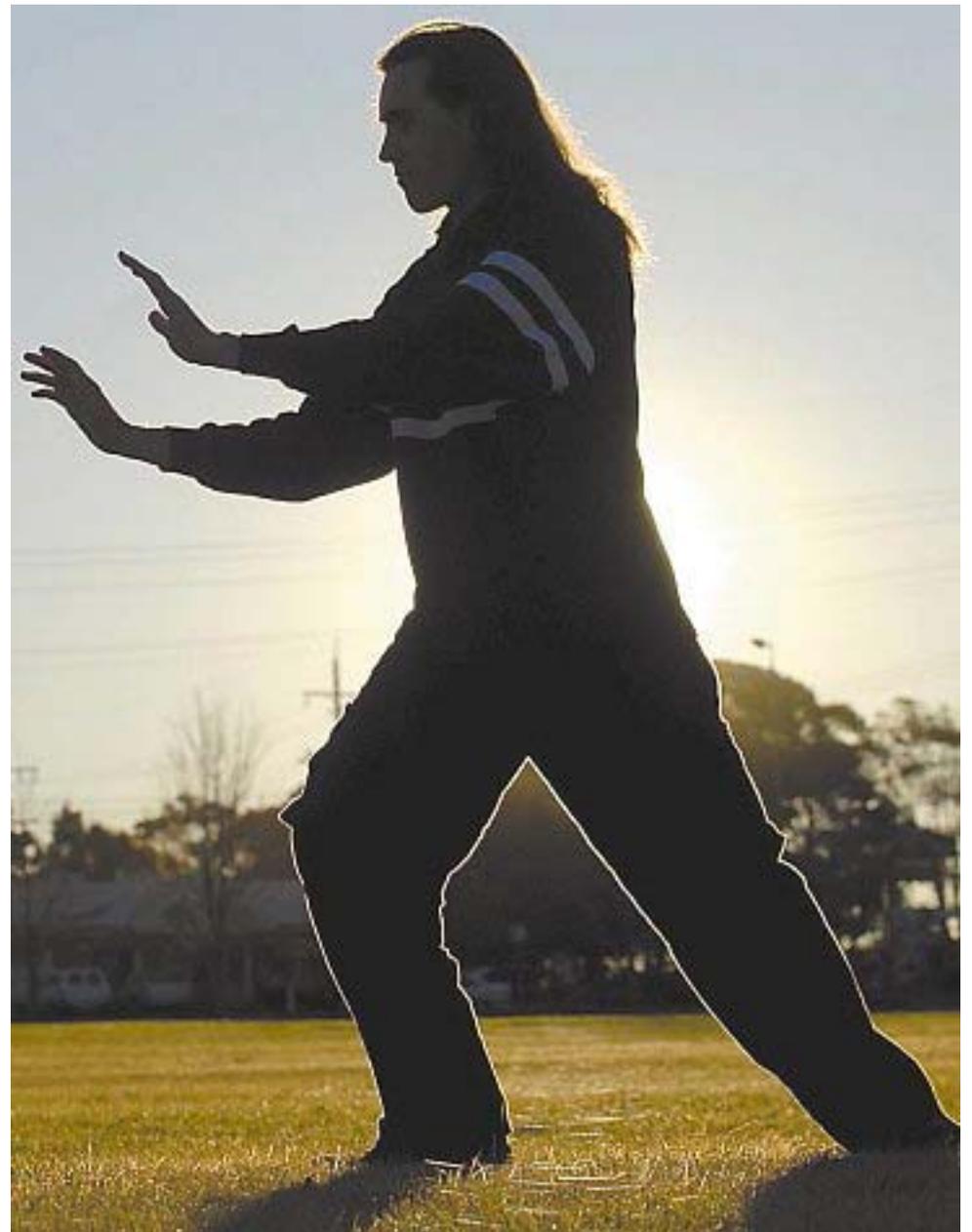
In two short decades, the numbers of people involved in tai chi in Toowoomba has grown by more than 200%; from just a handful to a decent-sized and enthusiastic crowd.

At least four different groups are based in town, all of whom meet in Queens Park every Saturday morning to exercise together.

“The growth has been massive,” Lindsay says.

“I think this reflects on modern society, which is so fast and stressful – we all need to learn to slow down, which is something tai chi forces you to do.

“As time goes on, the need for activities such as tai chi will become increasingly important as more and more people



► Tyler Hopper enjoys tai chi because of the mental focus it helps to develop. He says since starting classes, his concentration has improved measurably.  
Picture: BEV LACEY

# Ancient Chinese art stands the modern test of time

recognise its advantages.”

For those who are unfamiliar with tai chi, it can be most simply explained as a series of slow and graceful movements which improve balance, increase circulation, strengthen bones, and encourage mental focus and deep breathing.

Fans swear that it helps improve concentration and can even bring about better health while assisting overall fitness - and more than one billion Chinese would agree with them.

“Tai chi has been going since the time of the Yellow Emperor, and is based on Chinese philosophy, Chinese medicine, and martial arts,” Lindsay says.

“Everywhere you go in China you see little children in schools practicing tai chi movements, which would indicate that it is useful as a preventative measure for good health, and not just recuperative. But it is also common for doctors in China to prescribe tai chi as part of a treatment plan for patients.”

Two people willing to speak for the recuperative benefits of tai chi are Margaret and Michael Craft, who have been attending classes for the past year.

“I was told by my doctors that I needed to exercise, but for me, that’s a dirty word,” Margaret says.

“My health problems got to the point where it hurt even to walk, so any exercise I did had to be gentle and effective. I found that I was able to do tai chi, and it has helped.

“I call it ballet in slow motion. It has been good for my balance.”

Michael too, has seen improvement in his own well-being.

“I stress very easily, and needed to learn to relax. After a year, I can see and feel the difference.”

A lot of people might still view tai chi as an activity for the hippy types. Or perhaps for girls, or maybe just for old people. I certainly was guilty of making such stereotypes, thinking that this exercise was surely only for those with a bent towards spiritualism or seeking enlightenment.

A visit to the tai chi class in the Indoor Bowls Hall in Annand Street soon stilled any such notions however.

Here was an eclectic group of people; young and old, professional and retired, fit and recuperative.

Some were more graceful in their movements than others, some were able to take it to higher levels, some were clearly old hands at this ancient art form.

But unlike an aerobics class where you look and feel foolish if you keep falling off the



► Long-time tai chi proponent Lindsay Sheedy (front) leads a class at the Indoor Bowls Club in Annand Street. Lindsay has been practicing tai chi in Toowoomba for 20 years. Picture: BEV LACEY

step during the fast-paced workouts (I speak from bitter experience), this was very much about each person to their own.

I found the exercises easy to learn, and before long, I was breathing more deeply and calmly than I had in a long time. My mind cleared, and I became conscious of the energy within my body. The world’s stresses seemed a long way away. Everything seemed....slower.

“Some people say they find tai chi too slow,” Lindsay says.

“I teach classes to the girls at St Ursula’s, and they sometimes say that it moves too slowly. But could I suggest that those who find it too slow might be the ones who need to learn to slow down the most?”

“This is not an old person’s exercise. Everyone can benefit from tai chi.”

One of the younger members at the tai chi class I visited was Tyler Hopper, who has been enjoying the exercise for the past 18 months.

He has no health concerns, but can see the benefits of this activity in other areas.

“I tend to live in my own little world,” he says.

## Want to know more?

**The Australian Academy of Tai Chi and Qigong runs classes in Toowoomba every Monday night from 6pm in the Indoor Bowls Hall, Annand Street.**

**New classes begin on Monday July 13, and further information is available by calling 4633 1846 after hours.**

“Tai chi helps me focus and concentrate, for days after I’ve actually done the class. For me, the improvement is really obvious.”

Even after 20 years, Lindsay says he still has much to learn about tai chi.

He regularly attends classes with Master Rod Ferguson in Brisbane, who in turn learned from Grandmaster Gary Khor who first introduced tai chi to Australia in 1976.

“I will never know it all,” Lindsay says.

“I still have lots to learn to help refine what I do, and I will be learning until the day I die.

“I practice tai chi for around five hours a week - and I must admit, I don’t get sick very often. Can I put that down to tai chi? It’s hard to say.”