

Saito-ha Launching Ceremonies February 13, 2009

Our first launch of Saito-ha Shito-ryu took place in Albany, New York, on July 2, 2008. The TKFI Shihan Kai invited many instructors from across the country accompanied by their families and friends to witness this historic event. The packed room was emanating with encouragement, hope and dedicated support. Endorsements came from many respected martial arts masters and professional friends throughout the world. To provide opportunities for others to participate in the vision of this newly formed system of Shito-ryu, the Shihan Kai made the decision to hold ceremonies in Brazil, Oregon, Hawaii and Italy.

The second glamorous ceremony was held during our International training in Brazil, where Mayors, government officials, military representatives and business leaders participated in wishing our organization a successful future. Organized by Ubiratan Souza de Lima Shihan, the evening's ceremony included tasting delicious treats while entertained by Taiko drums and music by an accomplished pianist.

The third ceremony was held in August during the Instructor's Gasshuku in Grants Pass, Oregon, at the All Sports Park Pavilion. Organized by the TKFI Shihan Kai, the humble ceremony touched everyone's heart and rekindled the flame of eternal friendship and bonding.

The fourth ceremony took place in October at the beautiful and historic Wai'oli Tea Room, Oahu's hidden treasure and Honolulu's pride and joy since 1922. Several Shihans and Senseis including Walter Nishioka, James Miyaji, Lee Donohue, John Isabelo and Charles Goodin were present to endorse and witness the founding of Saito-ha Shito-ryu.

Our final formal ceremony was held in the beautiful country of Italy. After a fantastic Italian meal, Ivano DiBattista Shihan and the TKFI Shihan Kai joined together in pledging loyalty to remain committed and united in fulfilling all duties as true leaders of TKFI.

These launches of Saito-ha Shito-ryu were made possible by my instructor and teacher, the late Kenzo Mabuni Soke, son of the founder of Shito-ryu karate-do. If it wasn't for the latitude given to me by him, I would not have arrived at this decision. Before his death, Soke gave me his blessing to pursue my vision of Shito-ryu independently without the constraints of policies or rules of his personal organization. As you may know, this gesture of trust and goodwill is unprecedented. In fact I am the only instructor under Soke Mabuni who received his blessing to be independent.

I was deeply honored by his trust, confidence and most of all, his friendship. And thus, as I reached my 57th year in the martial arts, I felt that the time has come for me to initiate Saito-ha Shito-ryu Karate-do. I communicated my decision to the

Japan Seito Shito-ryu organization and in response, I received the following message from Tsukasa Mabuni Soke and her Council members, "We feel so sad to hear of your decision, but we respect and support your decision. As you know, the spirit of human-beings of Shito-ryu Karate is fully the same even though you have your own 'ha'. It means we are the same field of karate forever, and would like to keep a good relationship with each other forever. So when you need our support or help, please contact us anytime."

This unique opportunity of founding Saito-ha Shito-ryu will require teamwork, dedication and wisdom. We want to remain committed in order to endure struggles and obstacles which will come in many shapes and forms. Without a doubt, the path ahead will be challenging. We will constantly be examined and perhaps even criticized for our action. However the endorsements, encouragements and support we received reassure me that the decision to move forward is prudent.

Let us all be reminded that the mission of our new 'ha' and the TKFI is dedicated to the promotion, preservation and education of Shito-ryu and its traditions. We will always welcome our brothers and sisters of other styles and train together in the true intent of karate-do.

I would also like to commend the members of our Shihan Kai for your dedication, vision and excellence. It is through your support that I am confident of our continued success. Thank you my dear friends. You are the cornerstones and pulses of TKFI Shito-ryu.

Finally, I am honored and appreciative of all of you for your confidence in allowing me to pursue the founding of Saito-ha Shito-ryu. Let us learn to push aside negative agendas and egos that have no place in karate-do, be respectful and work together, and truly teach with integrity and honor. Seize every opportunity to teach and provide hope and encouragement while cultivating good citizenship. Regard every student as future leaders and positive role models rather than merely an opportunity for financial gain. Let us be the fine example of what karate-do truly is, and not a political organization influenced by arrogance and the 'status quo'. Let us all train with enthusiasm while maintaining a very high level of excellence in mind, body and spirit.

I look forward to meeting the challenges and opportunities that lie before us. I am confident that together as one family, the impact we will have in the world will be enormous. I anticipate many years of service and friendship with you.

Thanks also to my Shihan Kai family who has supported my decision to move forward on my martial arts journey.

Del Saito Soke