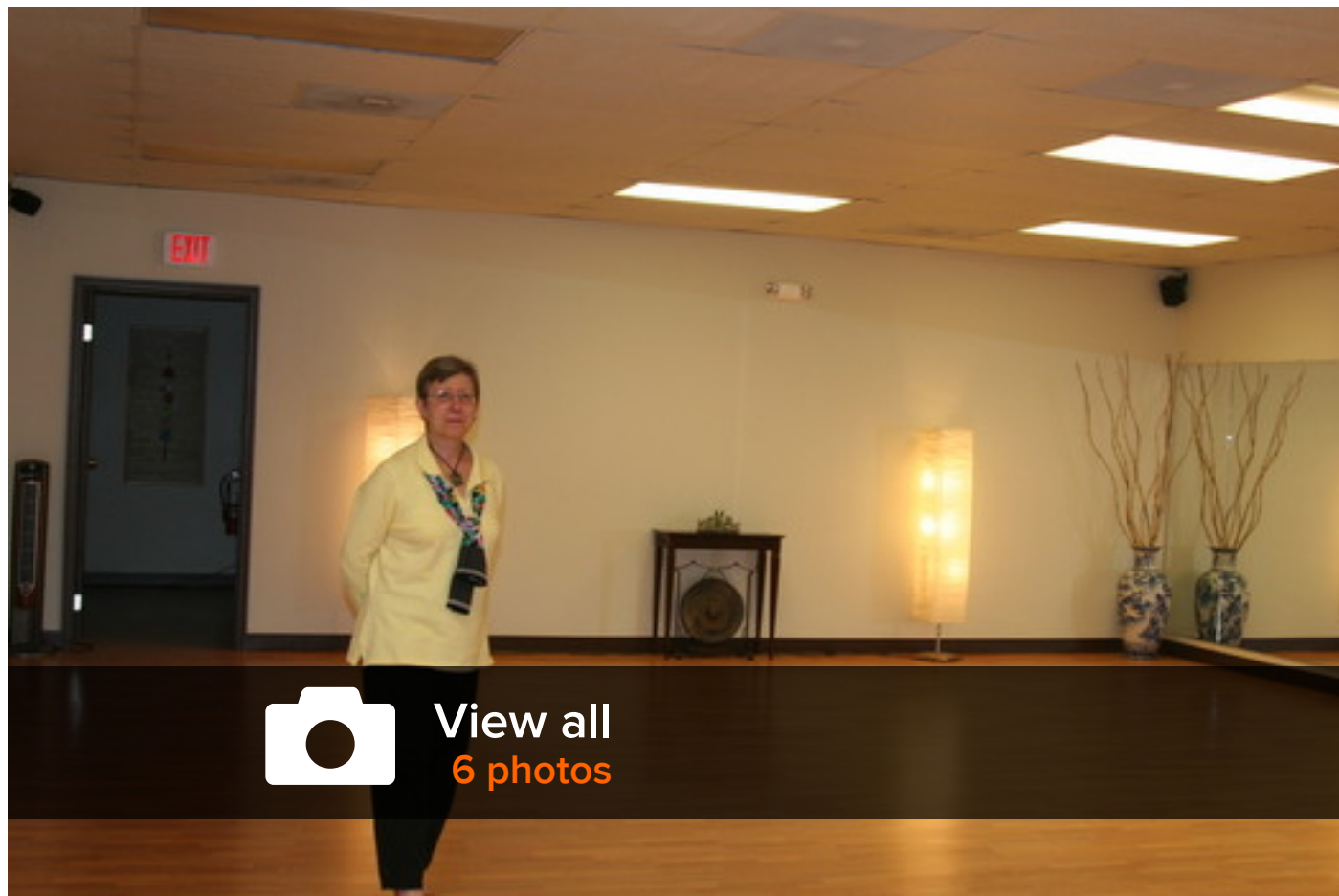


A non-profit business model

September 7, 2011

7:43 PM MST



Lorraine Noval and one of the studio at Asian Arts Group

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Do you teach [Tai Chi](#)? Do you actually have a studio where you can hang a sign with your school name on it? Unless you are in a big city, have name recognition as a Tai Chi master, or you also teach hard-style [martial arts](#) along side, it is extremely challenging to own your own studio. [Asian Arts Group of Albany](#), New York, provides an unique business model which can help you fulfill your dream to be a studio owner.



Asian Arts Group

John Carrier and Troy Termullo are husband and wife and have a common interest of Tai Chi. Lorraine Noval and Martar Banks are good friends and Tai Chi sisters for years. All four of them have learned multiple Tai Chi styles and forms. They used to rent space from various venues to teach. They all dreamed to have their own space that they could call "home" but they could not afford to have one.

A few years ago, somebody suggested pooling their resources together and jointly open one school. This novel ideal seems simple enough but it is not easy to execute. First of all, some Tai Chi teachers do not like to "share" students. Asian Arts Group's owners are wise and they don't have an ego problem preventing them from sharing students. When you check their website, you will not find any introduction about who they are. No class has the instructor's name listed. The next problem that most joint ventures face is dealing with money. Fortunately, all four of them had a day job (Lorraine retired last year) and do not rely on teaching Tai Chi to make a living. Their common goal is to share their passion for Tai Chi with others so more people can be happy and healthy.

Asian Arts Group charges \$10 per week per class, a very reasonable rate. To make things easier, you can also pay \$40 per month.

Location is the key to any business. Previously, all four instructors taught in downtown Albany. It was not easy to find a place large enough at a reasonable cost. After diligent searching, they found an empty office space in an old manufacturing area that is close to city but not crowded. Students actually prefer this location for easy traffic and ample parking. Even though the area is no longer for manufacturing, they went through a complicated zoning process to have the code changed.

To have the property owner completely gut a huge section of a large office building and convert it into studios, they were obliged to sign a long-term lease. The remodeling work was based on Asian Arts Group's design. After the rooms were built, walls were painted, and the floor was redone, the four of them made their own wall decorations and interior design from scratch.

Now, once you step into the school, there is a sitting area with chairs, coffee tables, wall hangers for coats and other amenities. You can make yourself a cup of tea while browsing through books and magazines. There is a small office adjacent to the sitting room, where the owners take care of routines and discuss business. Open the door on the other side and you are bathed in a bright yet soft lighting and soothing music. The beautiful hardwood floor is gentle on the knees and easy to practice on. This studio can easily accommodate 20 people and has large mirrors. There is a second studio that is approximately half in size. Lorraine explains that they use this studio mostly for beginner classes. Their teaching method involves having many small beginner classes to introduce people to Tai Chi. They are 8 weeks long with 5 or 6 students. With a small class size, students get more hands-on instruction and they are able to learn the routines better. Students can gain health benefits by practicing these short routines. But if they want to further their learning, they have a variety of classes to choose from.

Lorraine calls their business practice a non-profit model. Besides, paying the rent and utilities, the income will be used for the instructors' advanced education. Each year, each owner will take a couple of out-of-town workshops to broaden and deepen their own knowledge to make themselves even better teachers.

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