



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Sensei Nate Stephens takes a tea break with students Erik Perez, right, and Michael Fielden, not seen, during their class recently at the Hermiston Bujinkan Dojo.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

In addition to hand to hand fighting, the art of Bujinkan employs the use of numerous weapons.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Sensei Nate Stephens demonstrates how to use a sword to disarm an opponent with a naginata, a Japanese halberd, while training with student Erik Perez at the Hermiston Bujinkan Dojo.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Sensei Nate Stephens demonstrates an arm lock on student Michael Fielden as Erik Perez looks on during a class recently at the Hermiston Bujinkan Dojo.

# SENSEI STEPHENS

## Firefighter trains in martial arts, teaches others

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN  
East Oregonian

It's a peaceful morning at the Hermiston Bujinkan Dojo, but Nate Stephens is here to teach his students about war. Ancient war, that is.

"We train in a very old martial art — used on the battlefield for over a thousand years," Stephens said. The dojo combines training from about nine different types of martial arts, which as a whole are called "Bujinkan."

This martial art is used as the foundation for the Marine Corps martial arts program, and draws people from around the world and from different training backgrounds — including many with military experience.

"Bu jin — that's the symbols for warrior and divine," Stephens said. "Kan means house or clan. What it actually means is 'to not war with god.' But the most common translation is 'divine warrior house.'"

Stephens, who started learning the martial art in 1993, was recently promoted. He obtained his fifth-degree black belt, and teaches others the art as well. Part of Stephens' training includes traveling to Japan periodically to study with the grand master, 85 year-old Masaaki Hatsumi. He plans to go there again in summer of 2018.

"He's crazy good," Stephens said of the grand master, looking at one of the many photos hanging on the walls of the dojo.

Hatsumi also makes calligraphy paintings for students.

"I told him I saw a hornet, and he painted that and gave it to me," Stephens said,



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Sensei Nate Stephens demonstrates a disarming technique to student Erik Perez while training in Bujinkan at the Hermiston Bujinkan Dojo.



Contributed photo

Sensei Nate Stephens poses for a photograph with Grand Master Masaaki Hatsumi at Hatsumi's Hombu, head dojo, in Noda City, Japan, in 2014.



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pointing to a long, narrow scroll with an inky image of a bug-eyed creature. "Everything has a meaning. If the eyes are looking up, it means something different than if they're looking to the right or the left."

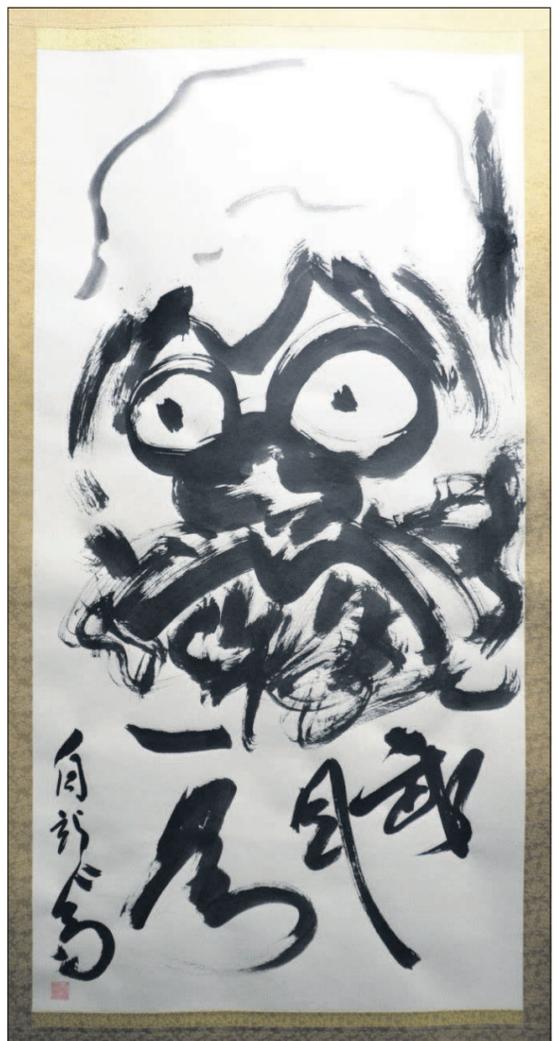
Stephens, a full-time firefighter with Umatilla County Fire District 1, teaches a few classes each week. He has two consistent students, and a few others that come occasionally.

At the beginning of class, Stephens and his two regulars, Michael Fielden and Erik Perez, stretch out and do a little tumbling to warm up.

Then Stephens begins demonstrating how to use the skills he's taught them to disable an opponent in a fight.

At first, movements are slow, and the opponents don't strike each other.

"Float, move, once again," Stephens said. "Attack their



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

A portrait of Nate Stephens with Japanese calligraphy painted by Grand Master Masaaki Hatsumi adorns the wall of Stephens' Hermiston dojo.

eyeline — let them come to you. Move to the outside this time. As he comes to you, just slightly deflect."

He knocks his opponent — in this case, Fielden — off balance and he falls to the ground. Then he steps off the mat.

"Have fun," he says with a grin, as Perez steps on.

After a few minutes of

fighting without weapons, Stephens pulls a wooden sword off the wall, one of a large collection. He shows them how to avoid an aggressor if they come at you with a knife.

"First move out of the way," he says, demonstrating as he talks. "Then grab the

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