



**HAENG UNG LEE  
AMERICAN TAEKWONDO ASSOCIATION  
FOUNDER AND ETERNAL GRAND MASTER**

Eternal Grand Master Haeng Ung Lee (July 20, 1936-October 5, 2000) committed himself to improving Arkansas and the world by teaching the values of life through martial arts as the founder of the American Taekwondo Association (ATA). The ATA's international headquarters have been based in Little Rock, Ark., for 29 years.

Lee is also the founder of the World Traditional Taekwondo Union (WTFU) and Songahm Taekwondo Federation (STF). Collectively, these sports organizations maintain more than 350,000 active members worldwide through their 1,200 schools in South America, Africa, Europe, Asia and the United States. Additionally, the ATA is the largest martial arts organization dedicated to the sport of taekwondo in North America.

Lee was born in Manchuria, China in 1936. Shortly after World War II, his family relocated to Korea, and Lee began his martial arts training in 1953. In 1956, he entered the Korean Army as a trainer for special troops and retired from military service three years later to open a taekwondo school at Osan Air Force Base.

While teaching on the base, Lee met and trained American Serviceman Richard Reed. At the conclusion of his service in 1962, Reed returned to the U.S. and invited Lee to join him.

Lee established himself as a taekwondo instructor in Omaha, Neb., where he and (now) Senior Master Reed became partners in a martial arts school. In 1969, Lee founded the ATA, and schools began opening throughout the country. In 1973, he became an American citizen.

### **The Move To Arkansas**

In 1977, Lee relocated the ATA's International Headquarters to Little Rock, citing similarities between the state's landscape with his Korean homeland.

Lee introduced the Songahm philosophy of taekwondo in 1983 after several years of development. The philosophy differs from the traditional styles of taekwondo in that it more clearly reflects the strength and beauty of athleticism and kicking techniques. More importantly, it instills the core values of strong character and positive self-esteem. He continued improving the curriculum of Songahm Taekwondo throughout the course of his life.

In 1990, Lee tested for the distinguished rank of 9th Degree Black Belt, and a petition was signed by more than 100,000 ATA members for him to be honored with the title of Grand Master. Even today, he is recognized as the first and only Master in history to acquire the rank and honor of 9th degree Grand Master under public documentation.



## **Economic Impact**

The ATA began holding its annual World Championships at the Statehouse Convention Center in Little Rock in 1990. The tournament has grown to include more than 6,000 competitors and ranks as the city's largest annual convention, attracting athletes from practically every state and several foreign countries.

Since 2000, the ATA World Championships have averaged more than 20,000 spectators and participants and provided an average of \$3.5 million in direct expenditures to the city each year. This year, construction begins on a new tourism attraction for Arkansas: the H.U. Lee International Gate & Garden on the corner of Markham and LaHarpe. The \$1.4 million project will welcome visitors to our state and educate them on the sport of Songahm Taekwondo.

Under Lee's leadership, the ATA supported (and continues supporting) numerous charitable organizations, especially the Muscular Dystrophy Association. For three consecutive years - 1987, 1988, and 1989 - the ATA received the Muscular Dystrophy Association Award and has donated more than \$1.5 million to help fight the illness. ATA was a proud sponsor of the 2006 Arkansas Sports Hall of Fame induction banquet.

Lee's personal honors and distinctions include the 1988 High Profile Award from Arkansas Business; 1994 Kaleidoscope Award; 1996 Crystal Award; Key of the City Awards from Omaha, Neb., Corpus Christi, Texas, Little Rock, Ark., Evansville, Ind., and Tallahassee and Panama City, Fla.

## **Changing Lives**

ATA has changed students' lives, instilling positive self esteem, taking some kids off the streets to lead productive lives, helping handicapped gain independence. In Arkansas, there are approximately 40 schools and 3,500 students.

In 1999, Eternal Grand Master Lee demonstrated his motto, "Today Not Possible, Tomorrow Possible," when he escorted a group of martial arts instructors to the communist state of North Korea. National officials have recognized Lee as a key diplomat who helped bring peace to the two Koreas. For his dedication, the Korean President, Dae Jung Kim awarded Grand Master Lee with the highest humanitarian award possible.

Lee passed away on October 5, 2000. More than 3,000 students and members of his international family gathered in Little Rock for his funeral ceremony. President Bill Clinton sanctioned Little Rock Mayor Jim Dailey to messenger a personal letter to the family at the funeral.

In 2003, a petition was passed to elevate the Songahm Grand Master to 10th degree black belt and the distinction of Eternal Grand Master, the highest position attainable in the philosophy of Songahm Taekwondo.

Eternal Grand Master Lee is survived by his wife Mrs. Sun Cha Lee and four children, David, Flora, Lisa, and Lucas Taekwon.

