

Featured Member

**Sensei Robert Fusaro,
Minneapolis, MN.**



Master Robert L. Fusaro is one of the highest ranking non-Japanese black belts in the world, currently holding a 7th degree black belt. He began his karate study in Japan during the Korean War. An American friend invited him to a karate class at the Japan Karate Association headquarters. He decided to join, not realizing it was to become a lifelong passion.

While training in Japan he had the distinct honor of participating in the first Japan Karate Association (JKA) tournament held in 1957, where he and seven other non-Japanese students demonstrated semi-free sparring. He also remembers seeing Master Funakoshi seated as an honored guest in the front of the dojo floor while students were demonstrating for him. It would be many years later that the impact of that moment would sink in, realizing that he had actually seen Master Funakoshi and been present at such a historical time in karate.

Mr. Fusaro received his *shodan* in 1959 from Master Masatoshi Nakayama. Fusaro's first school, the Twin Cities School of Karate, was located in the basement of his parents' home. He later opened his first dojo in downtown Minneapolis in 1960. By then karate had become a passion for Fusaro and he set himself the goal of becoming a master. He teaches an accredited karate courses at the University of Minnesota since 1965. His dojo, Midwest Karate of Minneapolis, has graduated hundreds of black belts and is located near downtown Minneapolis on Hennepin Avenue.

During the early years, he continued to keep in contact with the JKA and learned in 1961 that Master Nishiyama was moving to Los Angeles. While he has invited other Masters to Minneapolis to teach (Okazaki Sensei, Yaguchi Sensei, Mori Sensei), Fusaro began to realize that he gravitated towards Master Nishiyama's teaching style because of his deep knowledge and understanding of karate and his willingness to share it with everyone.

Fusaro continues to train and teach karate using the wealth of knowledge he gained from Master Nishiyama. His passion for the art has transferred to all aspects of teaching. He always maintains a level of familiarity, understanding, flexibility and respect for all his students. Fusaro has always felt that karate should be open to all ages and both sexes. In fact, he was the person who brought up the proposal that women should be allowed to compete in kumite in tournaments. Up until the late 60's women were only allowed to take classes. Fusaro now has the pleasure of having trained the first woman 5th degree black belt in the U.S., Nina Chenault. He also trained the first male 5th degree black belt in the North Central Region, Joel Ertl.

Those who witnessed recent demonstrations by Mr. Fusaro would have been amazed by the

tremendous power and speed generated by this septuagenarian. Sensei Fusaro currently serves as Senior Counsel of the AAKF Technical Committee, and Senior Advisor of the AAKF Executive Board of Directors. Master Fusaro's goal has always been to teach karate to anyone willing to learn, and he has often compromised his time, money and personal life to achieve that goal. But that is what makes him truly unique among martial arts instructors. Teaching karate is not really a job to him, it is a way of life that he truly enjoys.

Fusaro lives in Minneapolis with his wife Gloria who has helped him run the business since they were married in 1961. His two sons, Michael (4th Dan) and Darrell (3rd Dan) continue in their fathers footsteps by teaching at the dojo as well. Sensei Fusaro may be reached at rfuaro@midwestkarate.org.