# A Candid Interview with . . . Tony Interdonato

*by Linda Watkins · Martial Arts Magazine, Winter 1996 Premiere Issue*

This printable transcript follows TMAN's own archived reprint of an interview published in the premiere issue of Martial Arts Magazine, Winter 1996. The source is the February 10, 2001 Internet Archive capture of martial-arts-network.com/q&a2.htm (https://web.archive.org/web/20010210200751/http://www.martial-arts-network.com/q&a2.htm). The archived page is headed "Martial Arts Magazine Reprint," notes that it is "Reprinted in part from the premiere issue of Martial Arts Magazine, Winter 1996," was maintained by Ron Valli, and carries a last-update date of January 18, 1996. Wording below follows that archived reprint.

*(Reprinted in part from the premiere issue of Martial Arts Magazine, Winter 1996.)*

In this premiere issue of Martial Arts Magazine, we are going to explore some exciting new projects that are currently in development. We wanted to find out more about one in particular: "The Martial Arts Network". We sent our reporter, Linda Watkins, down to Boca Raton, Florida and caught up with Tony Interdonato, co-Founder and President.

**Q. We would like to introduce our readers to Tony Interdonato, president of "The Martial Arts Network". Hi Tony, thanks for meeting with us. Can you tell us a little about yourself and how you got started in martial arts?**

A. Hi Linda, welcome to Florida! I'd be happy to give you a little background on how all of this got started. My educational and professional background is in communications, marketing, advertising, and finance. Back in 1992, I was a Producer at a local television production company and at the time I was involved with several national television projects for different cable networks. In my spare time, my sons and I were taking karate lessons at a local martial arts school, West Boca Karate Center.

**Q. Who was your instructor?**

A. Master Ron Tramontano.

**Q. Ron Tramontano, isn't he the CEO of the Network?**

A. Yes.

**Q. Can you tell us something about him?**

A. Master Tramontano is a very motivated person that makes things happen. Besides being my instructor, he is my partner and very close friend.

**Q. What is his martial arts background?**

A. He is a 4th Dan Black Belt.

**Q. Do you know who his instructor is?**

A. Master Don Southerton of Newburgh, New York. Master Southerton at one time was the instructor for the United States Military Academy at West Point. He may still have that position, I'm not sure.

**Q. Can you tell us something about West Boca Karate?**

A. That is Master Tramontano's school in Florida. It is one of the larger schools in the country, with over 5,000 square feet and teaches around 450 students.

**Q. I understand he also has the North American Tang Soo Do Federation?**

A. Yes, he is the president and Founder.

**Q. What are some of Master Tramontano other accomplishments?**

A. Personally, I don't know all that this man has accomplished. It seems like every time we get together I learn something new, for example, last week I found out that he is a pilot and flies his own plane. He never ceases to amaze me.

**Q. That's great! He sounds like a very interesting person. We'll have to catch up with him in a later issue. Now, tell us about this great Web site, how did it come about?**

A. Well, have you ever heard of the saying, "I had a dream".

**Q. Sure. Don't tell me this came to you in a dream?**

A. Not me, Master Tramontano. This man goes to sleep and when he wakes up he has another great idea for us to work on. I can't remember the number of times that he has called me at four in the morning to tell me about a new idea of his.

**Q. I understand that this site has been written up in an on-line magazine as one of the coolest new sites on the Web.**

A. Yes, we were very excited. The way it got started was while Master Tramontano was investigating how to start a website, out of the blue Dr. Ron Valli called him and started talking about the web. Before you knew it, Dr. Valli signed up to make the website a reality. He now serves as our Web Master.

**Q. I believe that we are trying to schedule an interview with Dr. Valli to speak to us on the subject of your Web site and how we as business owners can take advantage of this very powerful new medium. What can you tell us about Dr. Valli?**

A. Dr. Valli is the president of the on-line portion of the TMAN Project. He is a 2nd degree black belt and a student of Master Tramontano. He is a very dedicated martial artist and brilliant at what he does. To quote Master Tramontano, "We are building the perfect team to make TMAN a reality".

**Q. What is the purpose of your Web site?**

A. Well Linda, The Martial Arts Network On-line is to support all of the different styles of martial arts. We want it to be a cyberspace meeting place for all of the martial arts practitioners in the world. The secondary goal of the Web site is to keep people informed of the progress of The Martial Arts Network which is an upcoming new 24 hour cable television network due out next year.

**Q. This is great. You mean to tell me that the martial arts community is going to have its very own cable television network?**

A. That's right. We have been planning this for more than two years and we intend to launch it in 1997.

**Q. This is really exciting! What can we as martial artists do to help?**

A. Right now we are signing up individuals and school owners to become Charter Members of the network and I would encourage anyone who is serious about martial arts to join right now before it's too late!

**Q. Why? Is there a deadline for joining?**

A. Yes. The exact date has not been announced as of yet, but we are going to cut off membership at some point in the near future. We are getting calls from all over and when we feel that we have a good cross-section of the country we are going to close membership forever.

**Q. Tony, you said that The Martial Arts Network is planning to cover all different styles of martial arts. Where is this wealth of knowledge going to come from?**

A. Right now we are looking to our Charter Members to fill this need. These are the school owners and individual practitioners who are joining the network and will be partnering with us on many exciting projects down the road.

**Q. You refer to joining the network. Can you tell our readers just what is involved in becoming a Charter Member?**

A. It is very easy to do. Any martial artist can contact us through our Web site and register immediately or if they are not connected to the Internet by calling our toll-free number. They will then be sent a membership packet which includes a company backgrounder and a personal profile. We ask them to fill the profile out in its entirety to ensure that all of their martial arts expertise is covered. Then they return the questionnaire to us, with a one-time fee of $99.00, and become a Charter Member of the network.

**Q. Why the $99.00?**

A. Good question. We impose this nominal one-time fee for two reasons. One, it helps us to offset some of the processing costs involved in signing them up; but second and more importantly, it reaffirms that they truly are a member of an exclusive group that will be entitled to many privileges once the network launches. In return, we are going to call upon them in the future to help us in various ways.

**Q. What are some of the benefits they will receive for joining?**

A. One of the most beneficial aspects of becoming a Charter Member, especially if you are a school owner, has to be our 1-800 leads program. It works like this: let's say that you are a viewer watching The Martial Arts Network at home. On the screen flashes our 800 number and a martial arts role model. (The role model we use will depend on the demographic of the time slot that we're in. If it is during a children's time slot, we would probably use Jason David Frank of the Power Rangers; if it is for adults than someone like Chuck Norris would be our choice.) The person on-screen would then announce to the viewers that to receive two free lessons at a participating Charter Member school, all they need to do is call our 800 number to register.

**Q. How does that benefit the Charter Member, how do those names get to them?**

A. What we then do is use our computers to lock in the person's name and address. We can cross reference by zip code who in that area is a Charter Member and channel the lead back to them based on their geographical location. In addition, the Charter Member will receive VIP tickets to all of our sponsored special events, a free hyperlink for their school on our World Wide Web page, a 20% discount on all related advertising and merchandise, and a free two year subscription to a martial arts magazine.

**Q. Wow, that's some package, anything else?**

A. Our Charter Members will also have a special area on our Web site that only they can access with a secret password. It will give them the inside track on what's happening and let them see a preview of any upcoming special events. It also allows them to leave us confidential messages pertaining to their school or to themselves.

**Q. What happens if there are two schools in close proximity that are both Charter Members?**

A. That won't happen. Every Charter Member who is a school owner is guaranteed an exclusive three mile radius. We accept applications on a first-come, first-serve basis which means that if you are in a busy area with many schools close by you need to sign up quickly.

**Q. Can you give us an example of a programming day?**

A. We plan to have a wide range of programs covering all styles of martial arts. We plan to have original programming in addition to classic martial arts movies. Martial arts news from around the world, a kids cartoon network, and how-to clinics on self-defense and kidnap prevention - all of these ideas will play a part in the overall content of our programming day.

**Q. You spoke of original programs, do you have any in development now?**

A. Yes, there are several that are currently being worked on. The underlying theme for most of them is to convey the message that martial arts is a smart and healthy alternative to drugs and gangs. We feel that there is a lot of money being spent to combat the drug problem but for the most part it is not having much of an effect.

**Q. Speaking of spending money, how much do you estimate that it will cost to get the network off the ground?**

A. We estimate that it will take approximately ten million dollars to get us to our launch date and then an additional twenty to thirty million to sustain us the first few years.

**Q. Forty million dollars! Where is that kind of money going to come from?**

A. A variety of different places. Besides our own funds, we have several private investors who are interested in helping us, as well as an investment banker who will be doing a private placement for us.

**Q. You mentioned earlier that you would like to use the network to help combat the drug problem. Do you have any ideas on how you are going to do that?**

A. Yes. One of the first things that we plan on doing is launching the Network with an anti drug telethon. We are currently speaking to Chuck Norris's people with the Kick Drugs Out of America Foundation. We will also be meeting later this month with the governor of our state, Lawton Chiles. He has several anti-drug programs that we can support with the network's inaugural telethon.

**Q. Any plans on where and when it will be held?**

A. We would like it to be held in Las Vegas in 1997. It will be an invitation-only affair for VIP's and Charter Members that will be broadcast nationally on both cable and satellite.

**Q. Other than Chuck Norris are there any other well known martial artists that TMAN is talking with?**

A. Our Charter Member list reads like a who's who in the martial arts industry. As word of the network gets around we are being contacted by many well known names. At a recent convention in Orlando, we spoke with Jason David Frank, who plays Tommy the White Power Ranger, about doing some projects with us in the future. He indicate that he would be very interested in helping us.

**Q. Well Tony, thank you for your time and we wish you much success in your exciting new venture. Is there anything else that we as martial artists can do to help the network become a reality?**

A. Yes! Call your local cable company and ask them to start carrying The Martial Arts Network. The more requests that a cable system gets, the quicker they will respond by making space available on their system for the new channel. In the near future, we are going to coordinate phone call and letter-writing campaigns, through our Charter Members, in order to create national demand for the channel which will help to saturate the country quickly. The more cable subscribers there are requesting the channel, the quicker we will

penetrate the entire country.

*(Editor's Note: Shortly after this interview, our magazine was selected to be the official monthly program guide for The Martial Arts Television Network. We will keep you informed of all of the latest developments in the coming months prior to its launch.)*

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*Prepared for The TMAN Museum at virtualcompetitionsonline.com/tman/. This is an archival transcript of a historical magazine interview, not a new publication of Martial Arts Magazine.*