

GROWING YOUR JUDO CLUB

By Gary Goltz, 9-6-09

In late 1987 I started our club. Prior to this date I was doing judo at a local USJF dojo that was a good 45 minute drive from my house. While I liked the head sensei there, some of the others in that dojo didn't treat me like I was really part of their club. I also was thinking about my daughter who was just about to turn 6 and wanted to have a place to teach her the way I was taught back in Pittsburgh under the famous Korean Champion, Kyu Ha Kim.

This resulted in me forming a goal and a mission before starting a club. After lots of thought I came up with the following:

The mission of the club is to improve our community by promoting the study of judo. This will be accomplished by emphasizing judo's principles of developing good character in people throughout our community.

My next step was to find a community center, parks department, college, or YMCA to partner with. Back in Pittsburgh during the early 70's I had 3 classes at different YMCAs all going at once! They used to be great places for judo in fact I started at the Jewish YMHA (H for Hebrew back in 1965).

My search resulted in partnering with a local community college. They let me use a mezzanine in their gym with old wrestling mats for 2 hours every Saturday morning. More importantly they ran an ad in their brochure which got mailed out to 5 or 6 local communities. Free advertizing is one of the main benefits for partnering with a community oriented organization.

Next it's integral to be part of one of the national judo bodies. I became part of the USJA in 1974 for the same reasons I'm still with them today. I felt the JA gave the club instructor lots of support, a good promo system, sanction ability, a database, liability insurance, fair pricing, and most importantly independence. Today as volunteer COO of the JA I enjoy helping new club leaders get started.

As my club began to grow I soon needed more days for practice and became disenchanted with the community college. So I started to search for a better partner and heard about the City of Claremont from the local gi supplier. He said they were easy to work with so I went and inspected their facility. While it was a bit old and dingy they were very positive people and my gut told me a good fit.

Once moving to Claremont things really seemed to take off. With more practice times our club was getting better known in the judo circuit in the region. I held my first club tournament in 1992 and now hold 3 a year plus the Winter Nationals. These are very powerful events that helped to put our club on the map.

Around this same time my daughter was winning major tournaments such as the junior nationals. Every time this happened I sent out a press release to all the local papers. Eventually I developed a good relationship with several of their reporters and got them to do a feature on my daughter. Soon I became very savvy at spotting stories with a human interest edge. For example when a blind judo player join our club, or when one of my older students in his 60's won at the masters, etc. I even got a reporter to take our women's self defense class and then she wrote a story on it!

The local papers proved a great source of free advertizing and with the weight of being part of Claremont's community services programs, the local papers regularly ran news about our club and stories about our students.

I established my website in 1996 when the Internet was still in its infancy using a very basic program. Again, free advertizing always seek it and learn to take advantage of it!

As my students attained higher ranks some of them branched out and opened up their own clubs. This at first concerned me but as it turned out it actually help my club grow even bigger. These new clubs brought in fresh ideas such as the one started by John Moe who serves as our USJA volunteer IT Director. John initiated interclub events such as tournaments, picnics, demos, that got everyone involved.

Today Goltz Judo is the #1 USJA club and I can honestly say I never sought out having such a big club. It was the result of lots of hard work, attracting talented people, and giving them space to grow and blossom. The list of those who contributed to our growth is a long one and includes people such as my very first member and right hand man O.J. Soler, Danny Martinez, John Moe, Nick Niakan, Tony Farah, some great parents such as Liz Estupinian, Patricia Wang, and major supporters like Dr. Z (Osvaldo Zarantonello) and Dr. James Lally to name a few.

It's very similar to building your own business and has always been a labor of love.



Me with O.J. Soler back in the 80's and today!



Current Dojo Alexander Hughes Community Center 2009



Baseline Recreation Center Dojo 1997



Chaffey Community College Dojo 1989