

It's All in the Family for a Grandview Couple Who Started a Karate Program

by Joe Dimino

• Contributing Writer

On any given Tuesday or Thursday night, you can expect more than the janitorial staff hard at work into the evening at Hillcrest Elementary School. Once you enter the south end by the gym, you can hear a chorus of shouts and may wonder what might be going on after-hours.

Inside the gym, Liz and Russ Babcock are leading a dedicated group of both kids and adults in a host of karate moves. The married couple from Grandview are the esteemed leaders of the Genbu-Kai dojo that operates in conjunction with the High Blue Wellness Center in Belton. The program has 35 current members.

On the evening of their first practice back in 2008, the Babcocks were not only inheriting a new karate family they had wanted to start, for some years, but also found out that their immediate family was about to grow.

"The first night we taught was very special," Liz said with pride. "Not only because we had our own dojo, but because that night I found out I was pregnant with our daughter (Arie).

During 2008, after an absence from formal karate, Liz and Russ decided it was time to create their own dojo. In their own backyard, the View in Grandview already had a program and they didn't want to interfere. When they contacted the Belton Community Center and found out that they had just lost their karate instructor, they smelled



an opportunity.

"I offered to come in and let them get to know me and what I wanted to bring to their table, so to speak," Liz explained. "The rest is Belton Genbu Kai history."

Russ began Ju-Jitsu in high school and headed into the Genbu-Kai discipline in 2001 while attending Pittsburg State University. Just shy of six years, Russ had earned his black belt.

On the other hand, Liz started karate as a Junior in high school. Nine years later, she had received her own probationary black belt.

"Karate is very personal, what works for one person won't for another," Liz said, who is a children's mental health worker by day. "I love that I have the time and ability to work with students one on one so I can help them see their potential with karate."

"What I have learned about Japanese culture is that they want to be the best at whatever they are doing," Russ explained, who is a design engineer for a tool and engineering company. "I like that concept."

The Genbu-Kai concept was introduced in the United States in the 1960's and is worldwide organization. Genbu Kai operates dojos globally in Japan, England, Spain, South America, Canada, South Africa.

Liz and Russ are very active with their dojo and participate in tournaments throughout the year. Annually, they travel to Pittsburg, KS, Wichita KS, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, California. There are also Genbu Kai tournaments in Detroit and Florida. The Belton dojo puts on several tournaments locally so that students have more access to safe, traditional tournaments.

Liz initially picked up Genbu-Kai because it was a staple of the community she grew up in, which was Pittsburg, Kansas. Russ, on the other hand, picked it up during college because it was available. Plus, the Pittsburg dojo afforded them the opportunity to meet and eventually get married.

"I love watching our students improve and push themselves," Russ began. "The students that have been

with us longest are starting to push themselves more and that's what I love to see."

"As teachers, we must be willing to step up and teach practical self-defense as a civic duty," Liz explains. "We also must ensure that we do not become a fight club. Karate is about art and discipline, about mental strength and physical toughness."

The momentum of having their first child, Arie, in 2009 has been made a big difference on how they live their lives. She has become a staple on the sidelines of most practices and tournaments.

"Having Arie has helped make me a better person and teacher. I realize even more than before that everything I do needs to be a good example," Russ said, who also says that his parents were his heroes. "As a teacher that is important because I can't ask anything of my students that I won't do myself. Except maybe to eat their vegetables."

"I am more self-aware. Arie has taught me that I want to make a difference with her and with students that pass through our lives," Liz explains. She said she finds strong women as role models around her. "I hope to be a good role model and to be someone both my daughter and students are proud of."

Both Liz and Russ are excited about their dojo's growth and would like to have their own stand-alone facility someday.

"I hope that Karate will always be in our lives to inspire us, make us laugh, and keep us strong," Liz concluded.