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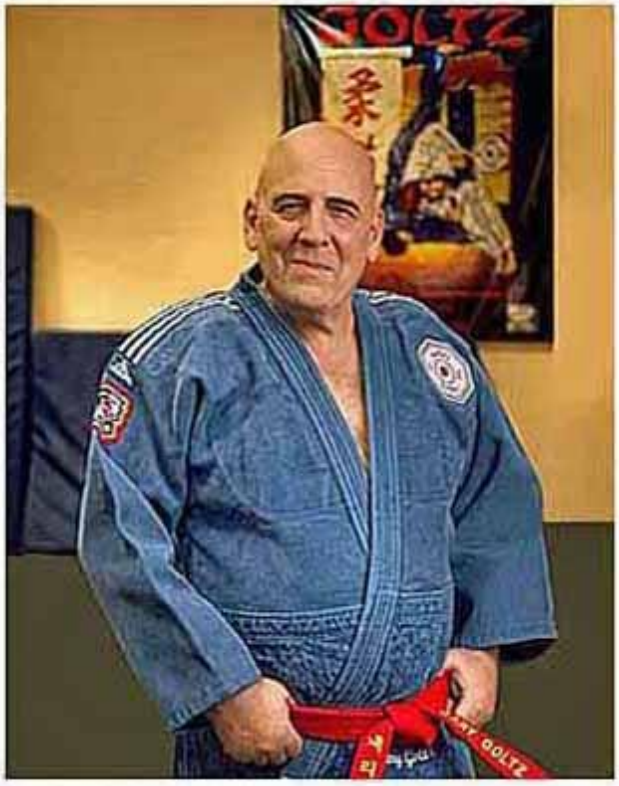
The Long Road from Judo to Claremont Legacy



Before I had even met Gary Goltz, the Claremont 4th of July Parade Grand Marshall, I knew he was a natural talker and people pleaser. He was talking to one person when I parked the car in front of Pizza n Such, chatting with someone else before the crosswalk turned green, and was engaged with a third person when I introduced myself. We sat down outside The Village Grille to chat and have breakfast on a beautiful Spring morning.

Gary's Judo story begins in the mid-1960s in Squirrel Hill, a predominately Jewish suburb of Pittsburgh. He was a shy, non-athletic ten-year-old boy when he first watched Bruce Lee as Kato in The Green Hornet and became fascinated by martial arts. He followed a friend into a judo class at the local YMHA in Pittsburgh, expecting to find an ordinary instructor. Instead, he encountered Mr. Kim, a former Korean judo champion, whose charisma and presence immediately left an impression.

"I instinctively knew something was special," Gary recalled. "It felt like a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

That instinct would shape the course of his life.

Judo became more than a sport. It gave him discipline, identity, and what he calls "stick-to-itiveness." Unlike traditional school sports where he often felt overlooked, none of the kids were too familiar with judo so Gary felt on equal footing. Over time, the lessons extended far beyond the mat.

One early turning point came as a teenager when Gary defended himself against a gang that was robbing local paper boys on payday. When two of the gang members approached him and demanded the money, Gary refused. "One guy threw a punch at me and I blocked it and gave him a front kick." Gary used a variety of Judo moves on another guy until they both ran back to the car and took off. The story made the local newspaper and instantly transformed his reputation at school. Looking back, he sees it as one of many moments where preparation met opportunity.

"Luck," he says, "is recognizing opportunity and taking advantage of it."

That philosophy followed him into business. After college, Gary entered the home medical equipment industry and quickly rose through the ranks. By his early thirties, he was managing multimillion-dollar operations, eventually helping grow a Chicago branch from five million to fifteen million dollars in revenue within a few years.

Despite his professional success, something felt missing.

While enrolled in Pepperdine University's prestigious President and Key Executive program during the late 1980s, a professor challenged Gary to identify what was absent from his life. The answer surprised him: Judo.

He returned to the sport almost immediately, eventually teaching Judo in various locations around Claremont, including the old firestation on the corner of Indian Hill and Baseline.

What began as a personal reconnection soon evolved into a decades-long commitment to teaching. Gary eventually established one of the region's most recognized judo programs through Claremont Human Services, teaching generations of local children and families.

For Gary, judo has always represented more than martial arts. He frequently references the two central principles of judo established by founder Jigoro Kano: maximum efficiency with minimum effort, and mutual welfare and benefit.

"It's really about win-win," Gary explains. "You give to get, and get to give." That philosophy became deeply woven into his teaching, relationships, and community work.

Outside the dojo, Gary developed another passion: restoring a 1955 Buick Highway Patrol car inspired by the television show Highway Patrol. What began as a nostalgic hobby evolved into national media attention, documentaries, friendships with Hollywood figures, and appearances in publications ranging from the Los Angeles Times to the Wall Street Journal.

Yet through all the achievements, Gary remains grounded in relationships and community. He speaks warmly about Claremont, describing it as reminiscent of the educated, close-knit Pittsburgh neighborhood where he grew up.

"I feel at home here," he says simply.

It was obvious that Gary sincerely appreciated being recognized for his contributions to the community and being provided a chance to share some of his life lessons. You can learn more about Gary by looking up Goltz Judo or finding him around town and striking up a conversation.

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