

WE DEFY FOUNDATION

**ANNUAL REPORT
2023**

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WE DEFY
FOUNDATION

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2023 ANNUAL REPORT: A LOOK BACK

2023 was filled with incredible hard earned milestones and achievements by our veteran scholarship athletes, ambassadors and instructors. We can't thank you enough for everything this community has done to support our mission of providing healing and recovery for our disabled combat veterans through Jiu Jitsu.

Let me first start off with thanking our over 700 approved gyms across 49 states, 2 US territories and even Japan. This is where the rubber meets the road, or in our case, the healing and recovery takes place. Although techniques vary, the gym owners and instructors that work with our disabled combat veterans provide the universal approach of treating this community just like any other student. They meet them where they are in life, take them in, and teach them just like anyone else. Jiu Jitsu then becomes the root ball for fostering and sustaining community, health and service which manifests itself over the year-long scholarship. Without the care, kindness and tough love from our gyms, our mission would not be possible.

Secondly, I want to recognize our ambassadors. We now have grown to over 400 ambassadors spanning the depth and breadth of this country. You all amplify our cause. You beat the streets everyday. You oversee the health and well being of our veteran scholarship athletes. You also contributed over \$100,000 in fundraising just through local events. The annual report highlights Riverfront Jiu Jitsu in Delaware, where gym owners Billy and Elyse Shaw continue to raise over 40k per year with their tournament-style fundraising event. Kudos to you guys. We also had record breaking numbers with our national Memorial Day and Veterans Day campaigns.

Lastly, our veteran scholarship athletes. You all continue to discover the healing power that comes with the practice of Jiu Jitsu. The supportive community. The better health choices. The quieting of the rumination. The calm that comes after training that is so difficult to come by otherwise. We are proud to have surpassed 1000 veteran scholarship athletes served in 2023.

Thank you to all our donor and supporters that contribute to the cause and enable us to serve our veteran community. Without your support, we would not be able to do what we do, which in our case, saves lives. We are excited about 2024 and beyond. We have lots still to accomplish and we are excited to share our forthcoming 2024-2028 strategic vision.

Travis Larson

MISSION & VALUES

A photograph of two men in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ) gi training in a gym. The man on the left is seen from the back, wearing a black gi with a large orange logo on the back. The man on the right is facing him, also in a black gi, and appears to be demonstrating or correcting a technique. The background shows a gym setting with a chain-link fence and some equipment.

Mission

We provide combat veterans coping with military connected disabilities a long term means to overcome their challenges through Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and fitness training.

Vision

A world where all disabled combat veterans are empowered to heal, thrive, and engage through the practice of Jiu Jitsu, fostering their physical and mental well-being, community connection, and self-reliance. We want We Defy to have a lasting and sustainable impact on the veteran community.

Integrity: We are honest, transparent, and we uphold the highest ethical standards in all our actions. **Discipline:** We take our mission, athletes, and supporters seriously. We are committed to personal and organizational growth.

Accountability: We take responsibility for our decisions and actions. **Community:** We foster a supportive, inclusive, and non-discriminatory environment for veterans and their families.

Transformation: We believe in the transformative power of Jiu Jitsu for healing and empowerment.

WHAT WE DO

WE ARE COMMITTED to our country, to creating a better life for our veterans and their families, our team and accomplishing our mission by providing training and support.

WE EMPOWER through integrity, discipline, personal accountability, mental and physical development, improved coordination, flexibility, adaptability, confidence, patience, and selfless service.

WE EVOLVE and expand our reach with the help of our volunteers, our sponsors, and approved training facilities to stay relevant and effective for the long term.

We raise money to pay for qualified disabled combat veterans to receive specialized instruction and attend Jiu Jitsu classes for 1 year at vetted and approved training facilities across the country. On average it takes approximately \$2500 to pay for an annual scholarship. We onboard a minimum of 45 new veteran athletes per month, with a goal of funding at least 540 veteran scholarships in 2024.

WHY BRAZILIAN JIU JITSU

Brazilian Jiu Jitsu provides a means for people to find themselves and connect to others around them. Nothing is handed to you in Jiu Jitsu. You must show up every day and earn it. This empowers our athletes


to take control of their lives, join a community of motivating people and improve their overall mental and physical health.

THE SCIENCE BEHIND IT

A study from the University of South Florida analyzed male US active duty service members and veterans from the Tampa area in a 5-month (40 sessions) Brazilian Jiu Jitsu training program. "Study participants demonstrated clinically meaningful improvements in their PTSD symptoms as well as decreased symptoms of major depressive disorder, generalized anxiety and decreased alcohol use."

"BJJ can be viewed as a problem solving opportunity for the practitioner that may instill a resilience that translates to life outside the gym. It has been suggested that a self-defense curriculum may provide an enhanced exposure therapy-like experience. Allowing veterans to repeatedly practice problem solving and successfully resolve difficult, uncomfortable struggles may promote re-learning how to be effective in adverse circumstances. Perception of being capable of contribution to the resolution of a traumatic event may lead to fewer symptoms of PTSD."

"A potential benefit of BJJ is that it forces its practitioners to engage in social interaction; the only way to practice and learn is to have training partners to grapple with. In addition to social interaction, the training paradigm in this study could also provide a degree of social support, since the participants were interacting with others who shared similar life experiences." SOURCE: Military Medicine, Vol 184 November/December 2019



“Jiu-jitsu has LITERALLY saved my life. When I started training I was 183 lbs., out of shape, and spending all day in a wheelchair on my way to an early grave. I am now 150 lbs., I train 5-6 days a week, and I’m in the best shape of my life since my military service.” - Joey

REGULATORY COMPLIANCE

Compliance Partner The Foundation Group (<https://www.501c3.org/>) provides the We Defy Foundation with up to date advising on our state and federal compliance filings, including IRS Form 990 preparation, state charitable registrations, and state specific guidance to ensure annual ongoing compliance with each state's Division of Charities' fundraising regulations.

- IRS Form 990 is the information (tax) return that all 501(c) nonprofits must file annually. It focuses on financial activity and identifies areas of compliance, governance, structure, procedures and activities.
- Charitable solicitations registration is currently required in 41 states plus Washington, DC, prior to soliciting the public for donations.

The Foundation Group helps ensure our IRS Form 990 is submitted on time and posted publicly. They provide an annual review of our books, help direct operational improvements and identify regulatory and compliance priorities. They also provide guidance on questions such as commercial co-ventures, tax considerations, and how to classify specific expenditures.

Completed State Solicitation Registrations

California, Minnesota, and Texas

In-Progress State Solicitation Registrations

Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Utah

External Audit - Annual external auditing is being performed from 2021 on. Reports will be available alongside our IRS Form 990s on the We Defy website.

Planned State Solicitation Registrations

All 41 states by late-2024 that require registration for permission to solicit donations, in descending order by planned activities and donor interest.

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Over 1000 Veteran Scholarships

Since the founding of We Defy in 2015, we have been providing veterans with the opportunity to heal through Jiu Jitsu. However, due to the hard work of our ambassadors and the generosity of our community, we have grown significantly in recent years; growing from 3-5 veterans per month to 45-50 veterans per month only in the last 3 years. This propelled We Defy past the 1000 veterans served milestone in 2023. Although an incredible achievement, we are just scratching the surface of veterans that can benefit from community, health and service through the practice of Jiu Jitsu.

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Inaugural Annual Ambassador Summit

In 2023, We Defy hosted our first Ambassador Summit in Delaware at Riverfront Jiu Jitsu. Billy and Elyse Shaw, owners of Riverfront Jiu Jitsu, have become a fund raising force for We Defy, raising \$40,077 in 2023. With the help of our regional lead Brian Grant and the efforts of scholarship veteran athletes like Stefan Talabisco, this team has proven to be a model of excellence for We Defy and our community.



Carry The Load Beneficiary

Three years ago We Defy established its partnership to Carry the Load. Since then, the partnership has evolved to a more elevated status with Carry the Load promoting We Defy to the status of Beneficiary. As a beneficiary, We Defy is a recipient of bonus donations from Carry the Load. Again, due to the incredible fundraising efforts from the We Defy community, Carry the Load augmented this effort by a surprise award of \$50,000 at this year's We Defy gala in September. The Carry the Load partnership has evolved to become one of our marquee fund raising events of the year. We look forward to continuing this relationship in the future.

JOCKO FUEL

For several years, We Defy and Jocko Fuel have been working to figure out ways to support each other. This year, our Veteran's Day Fund Raising effort was Powered By Jocko Fuel. We were certainly proud and honored to have Jocko Fuel help promote our mission along with donating product to those early adopters of our campaign. We look forward to future endeavors with Jocko Fuel.

Prove them Wrong

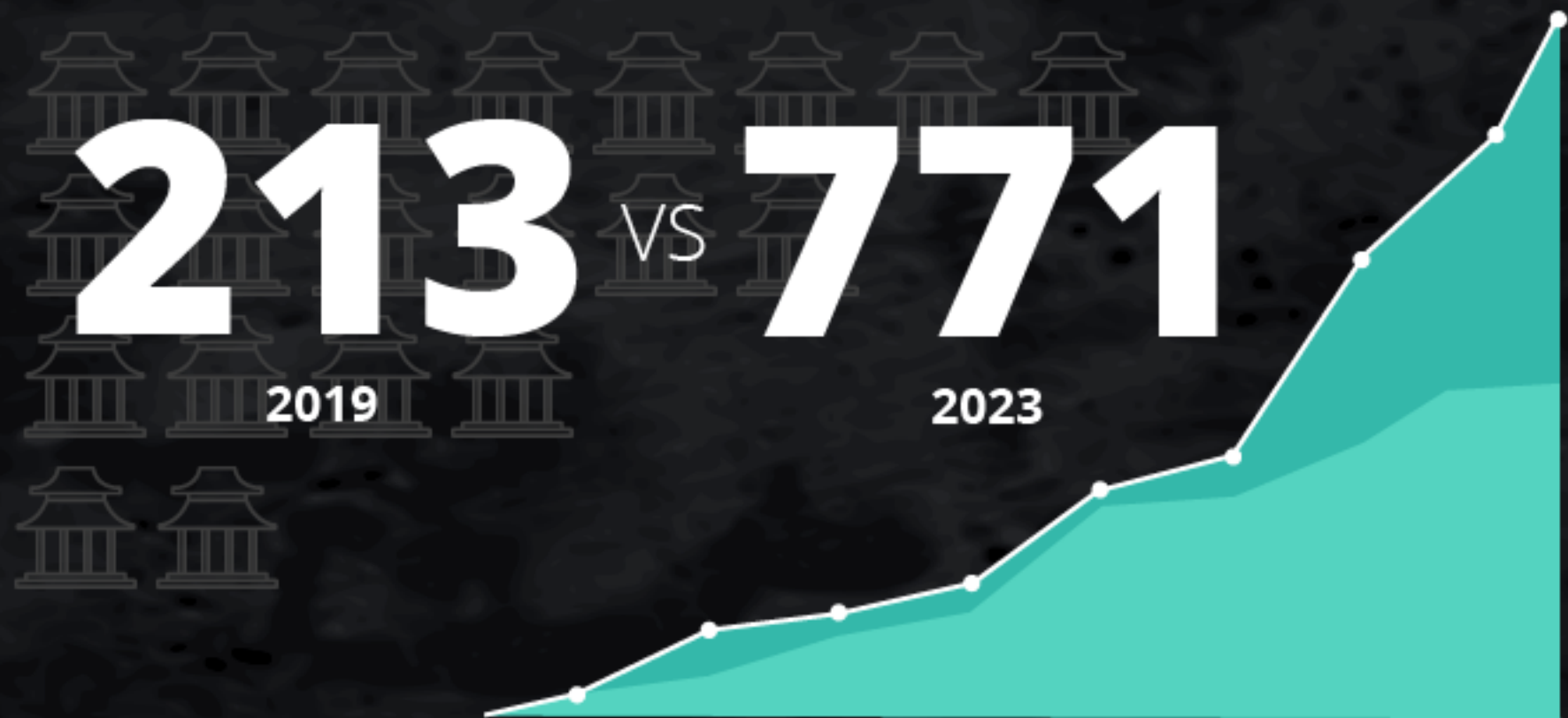


OUR GROWTH: 2019-2023

AMBASSADOR GROWTH



APPROVED TRAINING FACILITIES



49 States with affiliate gyms and 2 US Territories and Japan

OUR GROWTH: 2019-2023 CONTINUED

VETERAN SCHOLARSHIP ONBOARDING

2019



2023



TOTAL SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED



CURRENTLY ACTIVE



TOTAL AWARDED

FINANCES

2023 FORECAST

\$948,335
TOTAL REVENUE

\$1,002,378
TOTAL SPENDING

\$831,974*
PROGRAM SPENDING

Veteran's Day +\$130k

Annual Gala +\$150k

Memorial Day +170k (includes 50k bonus check)

— We are an entirely volunteer run organization. **This allows us to keep our program to overhead expense ratio over 80%. It is our goal to drive every dollar possible to our veteran athletes.**

— It currently costs approximately \$2,500 to fund a one-year scholarship for a disabled combat veteran in our program.
— Annual external audits are conducted from 2021 on

"I'm getting out making friends and love Jiu Jitsu. I recently took third at a tournament over in Tacoma, Wa. I still take my meds but without We Defy and Professor Brown I would still be hiding in my house. I just wanted to take the time to say thank you and tell you things have gotten much better with everyone's help." - Keith



BOARD



Travis Larson, President

Travis started training Jiu Jitsu in 2014, earned his blue belt under former board member, Professor Gina Franssen in 2016 and his purple belt under Professor Manuel Flores at Daimyo BJJ in Tucson, AZ. Mr. Larson has been a consistent supporter of the Foundation since its inception. He graduated from Carnegie Mellon University in 1996, has built a career in Software Development and managing remote teams working for Northrop Grumman/Peraton since 1999. He brings a background of strong project & budget management, process improvement and remote & distributed team leadership skills to the board. Travis has experienced firsthand the mental health benefits of training in Jiu Jitsu. The camaraderie, support and accountability in the Jiu Jitsu community were critical to his recovery from a hemorrhagic stroke in late 2015. His wife and three children are also active Jiu Jitsu students.

Mike Anderson, Treasurer

Mike Anderson is an active Brazilian Jiu Jitsu competitor and coach. He earned his Black Belt from Professor Alan Shebaro in 2019 after more than 10 years of consistent training and competing. Mike trains at the We Defy Foundation Headquarters in McKinney, TX and has been actively supporting the foundation since its start. Mike has spent his career in the financial services industry and is a Financial Advisor working with families and small businesses. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin with a degree in Consumer Science and Personal Finance and brings a comprehensive background of budgeting, money management, and financial planning to the board. Shortly after moving to Dallas from Minneapolis in 2011, Mike met and began training Jiu Jitsu with Professor Alan Shebaro. As the We Defy Foundation took shape, Mike was able to see first hand how important a tool Jiu Jitsu can be to deal with some of the physical struggles and mental health issues facing everyone, especially disabled combat veterans.





TJ "Blitz" Kreutzer VP/Director of Operations

TJ graduated from the US Air Force Academy in 1999 with a degree in Behavioral Sciences. Over the next several years he attended NATO's premier fighter pilot training course, EURO-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training (ENJJPT) and became an F-16 fighter pilot. He served overseas in Korea and deployed to Iraq as a combat flight lead, and was recognized as the Hill Air Force Base Flight Lead of the Year in 2005. Later he served as an instructor and evaluator pilot at ENJJPT, overseeing student training and managing several operational components of the program. During that time he also earned an MBA from Texas A&M - Commerce. He retired after more than 20 years of service in 2019. TJ began his Jiu Jitsu study in earnest in 2015 and has been an active Masters competitor, medaling at several IBJJF Worlds level events and appearing on multiple Fight 2 Win cards. TJ is currently a brown belt. One chance meeting with a struggling veteran after a Jiu Jitsu class inspired him to search for a volunteer opportunity. Soon after, TJ became aware of We Defy Foundation and applied to serve as an ambassador. TJ is passionate about helping people understand why Jiu Jitsu works as a tool for helping disabled combat veterans cope with their challenges. He firmly believes that components of the practice, such as human touch and personal accountability, are easily overlooked and yet integral to the healing process. TJ uses the organizational skills he practiced as an Air Force officer to help manage the day-to-day operations of We Defy Foundation.

Kevin Linderman VP/Director of Development and Marketing

Kevin Linderman started his Jiu Jitsu journey in 2016 under Alex Martins at AMBJJ in Dallas, TX. Kevin currently is a brown belt. To put it mildly, Kevin is an evangelist for the sport of Jiu Jitsu and believes anyone and everyone should be able to share in the camaraderie, fellowship and overall journey that is Jiu Jitsu. Kevin earned his undergraduate from the University of San Diego in Psychology and his Masters from the University of Colorado in Information Systems. At his core, Kevin is a creative problem solver, that is self-motivated, leads by example, and motivates others through hard work and dedication.





Steve Hargett - Secretary

Steve Hargett enlisted in the Marines in November of 2001 while still in High School and was shipped out to bootcamp shortly after graduating in 2002. After finishing Infantry School, he was sent to 1 st Battalion 7 th Marines, "Suicide" Charley Company. In January of 2003 only 2 weeks after arriving at his duty station his unit shipped out to Kuwait. Steve deployed with 1/7 for 10 months in 2003 and again in August of 2004. After his second deployment Steve was sent to Mojave Viper to be an Urban Warfare instructor with the focus on urban patrolling with tanks. After the Marine Corps Steve worked overseas in the private sector as a security contractor. Shortly after leaving the Marine Corps a friend that served with him in Iraq invited him to join a Jiu Jitsu class and from there he was hooked. "As someone who has directly benefited from the power of Jiu Jitsu, I want to share my Jiu Jitsu Journey with as many people as possible. Jiu Jitsu can fill a void that many veterans feel after leaving the service, it provides you with a group of individuals that are all sharing the same struggle, overcoming obstacles, and being uncomfortable together. Jiu Jitsu has done so much for my life- it is my passion and mission to share this amazing art with everyone who wants to benefit from it". Steve is a Jiu Jitsu Black Belt under Sensei Xande Ribeiro and has been training Jiu Jitsu since 2007. He is an active competitor and is currently the number one ranked Medium Heavy NoGi competitor in IBJJF. Steve is the Founder and Owner of Hargett Performance in La Quinta, California. community of individuals ready to face the challenges that we will all encounter in daily life. Steve resides in Austin, Texas with his beautiful wife and 3 daughters.

THANK YOU

