

Springstowne Wrestling Academy winning on and off the mat

Program winning on and off the mat for two decades



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By [THOMAS GASE](#) | tgase@timesheraldonline.com | Vallejo Times Herald
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It's been a nice century so far for the Springstowne Wrestling Academy.

On May 8 Springstowne won its 20th straight Vallejo City Championship. To commemorate the occasion, organizers in the academy created a T-shirt that has the name of more than 800 kids that have participated in the program since 1996. Since there are so many names, the type for each of them on the shirt, well, it's pretty darn small.

The impact that the program has given those kids, however, is bigger than the Atlantic Ocean.

Although Springstowne has seen numerous victories over the past two decades locally and nationally, the pins for the program haven't just come on the mat, they've come on maps with field trips. The program didn't just want a grappler to earn points, it wanted them to earn a diploma.

"As a program, it's grown to be more than just wrestling," co head coach Jason Guiducci said. "It's become more about community service and what can we do more to help the community. Overall, that's become the goal of the program."

Guiducci, who is also a head wrestling coach at Justin-Sienna, went on to say his favorite part of the program isn't seeing the wins on the mat, but when kids come back to visit after they've gone on to do something else such as graduate from college. "It's about the simple things such as a kid coming back to say thank you. Sometimes it's all about the kid that finally climbs the rope in gym after previously thinking they couldn't do it

One of Springstowne's top all-time wrestlers has been Shelly Avelino, a state qualifier a number of times at Benicia High. Avelino, who now wrestles as a junior at Menlo College, said one of her favorite parts about wrestling for Springstowne was her trip do New York.

"Getting to explore New York as an eighth-grader was a lot of fun," Avelino said. "And the trip never repeats for the kids. Mine just happened to be in New York, but every year it's somewhere different. Over time I've had so many opportunities thanks to wrestling and now I'm able to travel all over the place because of it."

When Trave first began the program as part of Springstowne Middle School, it was mostly boys that were part of the program. Trave gives credit to Guiducci for making sure girls became part of the program and to this day the team features more girls than boys.



"Jason did a great job of noticing the girls movement in wrestling," Trave said. "He raised the bar to another level."

When Guiducci was asked what four wrestlers would be on the program's Mount Rushmore, he had to think for a minute, but eventually it was three female wrestlers – Avelino, Ricki Liang and Alyssa Wong, that he thought would join Terry Allen, one of the program's first stars in 2005. Liang and Wong each wrestled for Jesse Bethel High, although Liang would graduate from Benicia High and win a state championship in 2015 as a Panther in the 121-pound division. Wong won back-to-back state championships in 2011 and 2012 in the 138-pound division, including an undefeated senior year. Avelino won a state title in 2017 in the 137-pound division.

Although Avelino has seen a ton of success since Springstowne, she still looks back fondly at those days.

"What I remember liking the best was just the whole community you were part of. The team was big. About 70 kids," Avelino said. "These days in college the wrestling community is big, but for the most part the guys wrestle separate from the girls and aren't together much. In Springstowne we were always together and we were all friends. I still talk to a lot of those people when I can. More than anything, Springstowne made wrestling fun. It wasn't just competing and all about pressure. It was fun."

Springstowne Middle School closed in 2011, but after the city saw what the program was doing to the city's youth, wrestling was kept as an academy.

Since then it's mostly been great news for the program. Kent Bailo, director of the U.S. Girls' Wrestling Association, called Springstowne Wrestling Academy "a cult of good" in a 2013 ESPN article.

"It's not a class anymore, it's an academy," Trave said. "There is a lot of commitment involved on their part. Eighty percent of success is just showing up. And you have to show up to at least 70 percent of our meets and competitions. You have to help with community service. And you have to stay out of trouble. Due to this, we end up with a lot of good kids, kids that make the honor roll and get good grades."

Although Trave had been a huge factor, he almost brushes off the notion and tends to give more the credit to Guiducci.

"Ah, he runs the show," Trave said. "I'm the guy that will run the practices a lot, but he organizes a lot. I think we both know our roles and that's why we've gotten along so well. I think I'm kind of like his sidekick. Jason had put in such a tremendous effort, way beyond what he has to. He's kind of like a knight in shining armor. Which is a good thing."



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