

cut out and save for a martial artist you know

A MARTIAL ARTS EDUCATION

**Tony Annesi, head instructor,
BUSHIDO-KAI, 92 Blandin Ave., Framingham**

Public Business or Private Club?, 1

In the '60's, when there were only a handful of martial arts schools in the state, all schools were private clubs. Mostly adult males got together to learn as much as they could from a leader who studied in the Orient during a military stint. George Mattson, figured that he could market what he knew with various green, brown and black belt courses. He was monetarily successful while other instructors were satisfied teaching a small group of devotees. In the '70's, Fred Villari took the merchandizing of martial arts to an extreme and built himself a huge network of studios. To the extent that he was successful, he was snubbed by those who felt that martial arts should not be "cheapened" by commercialism. In the '80's, commercialism was a force not to be denied. Many schools, barely getting by with a few dozen students, joined newly formed tuition collecting groups

that taught them how to run their schools as businesses. It turned out that Mattson and Villari, for better or worse, were pioneers. Private clubs were always seeking out methods to stimulate enrollment. They were caught between the rock of economic reality and the hard place of preserving a martial tradition. Economics often won out. Soon 99% of schools were small businesses and greater numbers of these each year joined tuition-collecting companies and sharpened up their business acumen. A very few schools refused to go fully into the business mode, among these were Tony Mirakian's, Walter Mattson's, Larry Garron's and BUSHIDO-KAI.

**BUSHIDO-KAI:
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Public Business or Private Club?, 2

The consumer both gained and lost because of the turn toward business. Certainly good business skills meant that more schools would be around for longer and could often offer a much nicer facility than could an old-style club; but, in some cases, rents were so high where the martial arts business tended to congregate that they often could not offer a large, comfortable facility and might, in fact, not stay around very long unless they secured a large number of student contracts. The martial arts business would be run much like ballroom dance schools of the '50's. Contracts are their bread and butter. As consumers got used to this as a fact of life, they were less opposed to con-tracts for martial arts instruction. In some cases, students found they had paid for something they did not want but had to pay for anyway. The martial arts businesses, recognizing the poten-tial for disgruntled students,

discovered new ways to keep the students happy. A more frequent rate of pro-motion was prime among them. The consumer therefore gained the rank that he strongly desired but lost the detailed instruction and hard work that the elite private clubs originally offered. If martial arts are to be available to everyone, however, something had to give. The best of the contract schools work hard at keeping their students happy while keeping their standards up. The best of the private schools, and there are very few of these around, make sure not to accept stu-dents who want a quick rank. These private academies may be run in a business-like manner but they are institutes of learning and preserving martial arts heritage, not predomi-nantly businesses.

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