

Idaho nonprofit offers 'lifeline' for veterans, first responders

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One former Marine is providing veterans and first responders with a year-long introduction to jiu jitsu – free of charge, writes guest columnist Chuck Malloy.

Armor of God Jiu Jitsu, Inc.

The name of [Dan Gandy's nonprofit in Pocatello](#) tells everything about what's in his heart. And if you have admiration for veterans and first responders, you'll love what he's doing.

The 52-year-old Gandy, a former Marine, is providing veterans and first responders with a year-long introduction to jiu jitsu – free of charge. He has no ambition for personal gain.

"I don't want to make money off it – I just want to help people," Gandy says.

Gandy's other motivation is a love for jiu jitsu, and the challenging training that goes with martial arts. He says it has helped him through some dark times of his post-military life, including the death of a son in 2021.

"When I left the Marine Corps, I carried the same weight that so many veterans and first responders know so well – the loss of structure and the feeling that the world kept moving while I was trying to figure out who I was supposed to be," he said.

"Eventually, I realized I needed something healthier – something that grounded me, instead of pulling me farther away from myself."

Jiu jitsu ended up being a turning point in his life. Now, he is pursuing a master's degree in clinical rehabilitation counseling while working as a real estate agent and an operator of a blacksmithing business.

As for his ultimate career goal, he said, "I want to provide the help that so many veterans need."

Gandy, who started his jiu jitsu scholarship program in January, expects more participation over time. At the moment, he has three participants – a Marine veteran, an Army veteran and a Pocatello police detective. A Blackfoot police officer has shown high interest in the program.

As with other nonprofits, fundraising is an essential part of Gandy's operation. He estimates the cost of hosting a class of five is \$6,500 a year.

"This is a scholarship program that funds veterans to train at any academy they choose eventually. However, until we grow enough to support all our participants, we

have partnered with Colossal Fight Company, where we are trained by an excellent staff of black belts," Gandy said.

Scott Card, the Pocatello police detective, says there are obvious benefits to jiu jitsu training.

"The Pocatello Police Department does an amazing job of training us, but you can never train enough for a job that can kill you," he said. "I have a wife and three kids that are under eight years old, and I want to be able to come home. If I can spend a couple of hours a week, on top of my regular gym workouts, then I can better myself with my defensive tactics. I don't want to end my life knowing that I didn't train hard enough. And I don't want to take someone else's life, or get myself in a situation where I could have avoided a more serious confrontation."

If given a choice, the 30-year-old Card would rather use his hands than a gun to neutralize a confrontation. With jiu jitsu, submissions tend to happen quickly – which is good in Card's line of work.

"I'm in this job to help people and make the community safer, and I don't want to hurt anybody," Card says. "I haven't used jiu jitsu skills yet, and that's fine with me. But I'm a detective, a member of the SWAT team and the street-crime team, so my chance of being in a violent situation is greater than the average officer."

As for the program, Card said, "Dan is so generous with his time and I'm grateful for him wanting to help veterans and first responders in our community. From a police perspective, the more training we have, the more likely we are to keep everyone safer – suspects, victims and even ourselves."

For veterans, Gandy says, "Community support doesn't just fund training. It restores hope, connection and purpose. It gives someone the chance to rebuild a life in the same way I've built mine. This is not a business or a hobby for me, it's a lifeline."