

Jasmine Dragons

A Success Story written by Angela Clements Cattell

When Matthew Martsolf was a kid, he loved to race motorcycles and travel across the country with his family to race in Motocross. As an adult he never forgot his love for speed and defying the law of gravity. After being laid off from Payne and Payne Custom Home Builders in 2009 when the economy slowed way down, Matthew decided it was time to turn his passion for speed and gravity defiance into a business. Fascinated by his four year old son's talent at using Poi balls, Matthew was inspired to teach people, especially children, this art form as well as various other types of aerial dance and acrobatics. Poi balls are tethered weights that are swung through a variety of rhythmical and geometric patterns. Eventually, with the help of his son, Luis, the name Jasmine Dragons was chosen as well as his perfect location in Chardon, Ohio across from the park on the square. Using his management skills from his former construction job, assistance from his son and some guidance from the Small Business Development Center, he eventually built his successful small business, Jasmine Dragons, to be what it has become today.

Jasmine Dragons is an Aerial-Acrobat Dance and YOGA Studio that runs, in part, like a co-op. Each instructor rents space from Matthew. The students can learn using a range of props from Poi balls to walking stilts to aerial silks. Mr. Martsolf teaches and travels all over the country working with youth development in balance, strength, confidence, and developing one's own style. Matthew and his students also travel and perform at festivals, fund raisers, theaters, and competitions. In addition they have weekly classes in acrobats and YOGA for adults.

In 2009 before opening Jasmine Dragons, Matthew realized he needed some help getting his business off the ground. That's when Mr. Martsolf turned to the Small Business Development Center. He met with Cathy Walsh, a counselor for the SBDC in Painesville, Ohio.



According to Matthew, "Cathy first helped me to understand the basic start-up process and what to do to save money. She taught me to do as much by myself as possible, and that I did not need to pay someone else for everything. Cathy guided me on how to be budget conscience and how to stay organized. She told me to keep track of all of my time and every expense, no matter how small. Cathy answered all of my questions and did not rush me." Five years later, Matthew now coaches about 65 kids a week in aerial arts and acrobalance and helps to

employ eight other instructors who teach yoga and acrobatics to both adults and children. His storefront is both colorful and interesting attracting the average passerby. The interior is divided into both a creative studio and an artistic retail section decorated with Buddha and dragon statues where he sells anywhere from t-shirts to surf boards. His students perform for nearly 200,000 people a year,

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from large venues to street festivals in New York, Denver, and Las Vegas to Cleveland's One World and Asian festivals. Jasmine Dragons is becoming both nationally and internationally known as Mr. Martsolf works diligently at building a positive image. World renowned Cirque performers stop by when in town to offer assistance and instruct students voluntarily knowing Jasmine Dragons' reputation for excellence. He is known as a role model for inspiring kids to be strong, flexible and healthy through good nutrition.

Currently, Matthew is outgrowing his location due to the high demand of his services. Also, Mr. Martsolf is being regularly contacted by non-profit organizations to partner up and offer under privileged and special needs kids various classes. Mr. Martsolf feels especially strong about helping both visually impaired children as well as orphaned children that need direction.



Matthew demonstrates the art of using Poi Balls that have long twirling ribbons attached.

Matthew recently contacted the SBDC this year to request counseling on both expansion and adding a non-profit sector. He met with Gretchen Skok DiSanto, who is a counselor for the SBDC at Lakeland Community College in Kirtland, Ohio. He explained to her that the non-profit organizations are more willing to work with him if he is non-profit or at least has a non-profit sector. He also explained to Gretchen he would love to expand into the theater next door to his location once it becomes available or add a second location in another area such as Mentor, Ohio. "Gretchen directed me to different resources and links regarding non-profits and referred me to a list

of specialized lawyers to help complete the complicated paperwork required in forming a non-profit sector," said Matthew. Ms. Skok DiSanto also suggested that Mr. Martsolf let his interest in the building next door be known even though it is not currently available, and that timing will be crucial once the space is unoccupied. Matthew also asked about the options of creating a "certification" for others who want to know about how he built and now runs his business so Ms. Skok DiSanto introduced Matthew to a website from Impact Training that showed an example of how you can set up a "train the trainer" program.

Matthew continues to work on forming his non-profit sector and finding ways to expand. He wants to keep working with the SBDC for guidance, ideas and to find additional resources.

In the meantime, Mr. Martsolf advises other entrepreneurs to "think outside the box...find the need and fill the need." Also, Matthew stresses to "track all of your time, save all of your receipts prior to opening as well as once in business and stay organized with your accounting." Lastly, he encourages great customer service. "Customer service is always key in any business," says Matthew. He states to "stay calm and don't react to difficult customers and usually the customer will calm down too." He offers a free yoga class to give the dissatisfied customer stress relief believing that many times an unhappy customer is just having a stressful day.

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Matthew emphasized how supportive the SBDC has been. "When everyone else discouraged me, Cathy (Walsh) from the SBDC was straight forward and pushed me to focus on where I would make income. She helped me determine my business plan."

Mr. Martsof emphasizes, "The SBDC was the only business help I had, and they were extremely helpful!"



Here Matthew is displaying his many acrobatic moves using the ceiling mounted silks in his studio.