



## ■ FEATURE

# Teach your parents well ...

## FENCING IS A FAMILY AFFAIR

Parents are being introduced to the sport by their kids • by Paul LEVY

**W**hy are there suddenly so many veteran fencers across the country? Lively discussions at Veterans Committee meetings mention the obvious: competitive fencers who turn 40, as well as people who used to fence in school deciding to try it again. But something new has been added. There is an increasing number of veteran-fencing-parents who have begun to fence competitively after their children became involved in one of the numerous youth fencing programs. Parents therefore find themselves car-pooling not only to Little League, tennis and other main stream youth activities, but also to fencing clubs, and many of those parents are joining those fencing clubs and learning to fence in order to participate along with their children. These are the stories of some of those parents who have taken the next step and ventured into USFA competition.

**Mark Goldstein** is a busy physician from Westport, Conn., whose son began to fence two years ago at Candlewood Fencing Center.

"I realized after a year of sitting on the couch at the club watching him that I am just getting fat. Since Mondays I play jazz piano and Thursday is tennis night, and I'm running three medical offices as a solo practitioner, I figure why not complicate things a little more? So I started lessons eight months ago. If I knew how great (and difficult) fencing would prove to be, I would have started years ago," says Goldstein.

Mark is not just a club fencer, he also competes in veteran's events in the Northeast, where most of the veterans have been fencing for quite a while. "Too bad there is no novice veteran category," he pines (By the way, Mark only has to look to the north a little, because several Boston veterans fenced in a novice competition earlier this year.).

In Los Alamos, N.M., **Tom Hill's** son, **Josh**, was always wanting to try new things, so he suggested Josh try fencing when Tom saw it advertised in the Los Alamos paper. Josh did, and he

loved it. When Tom watched him, it looked like fun, so he took it up as well at age 48. They fenced together for five or six years, through Josh's high school days, but when Josh moved on to college, he dropped the sport. Tom says he "had to decide whether to fish or cut bait. So I decided to become competitive and see how far I could take it and push this old body." Result: Tom was sixth in the 2003 Summer Nationals!

**Rich Lukash** of Great Neck, N.Y., observed a fencing exhibition in a summer camp when very young (he remembers the names **Bernie Balaban** and **Paul Rosenberg**). When his oldest daughter entered high school, he "wanted to give her an edge," so he found a coach (**Tanya Adamovich**) in the yellow pages and fencing lessons commenced. Rich "decided that it would be fun to do it as well. This became a bonding experience with my two older daugh-

The Escrime du Lac Division 1 women's epee team at the 2003 Summer Nationals included Anne Kercsmar, coach Zoltan Dudas, Louise and Eleanor Leighton and Joanna Niklinska.





ters. We went to lots of tournaments, including youth/veteran combos. Ultimately number three **Molly** entered the sport. **Sarah** and Molly evolved to Saber and **Abigail** and I chose epee.” All of his daughters have participated in the Junior Olympics. Now, Rich says, “we hope to resume traveling as a family to competitions now that Sarah is back from college.”

**Cynthia** and **Sean Ameli** of Las Vegas, Nev. saw their two children fencing in competitions. Summer Nationals took a great deal of time but was so exciting that they couldn't resist taking up fencing. Now Cynthia fences epee four or five times a week. Sean is also an epeeist, and he loves to fence with his kids but loses regularly to his 12-year old! It's an all-epee nationally-ranked family, with their daughter **NikNik** ranked first nationally in Y-10 epee as well as fourth in Y-10 foil; brother **Kain** is 3rd in Y-12 epee; Cynthia is 19th in WEV40 and Sean 35th in MEV40!

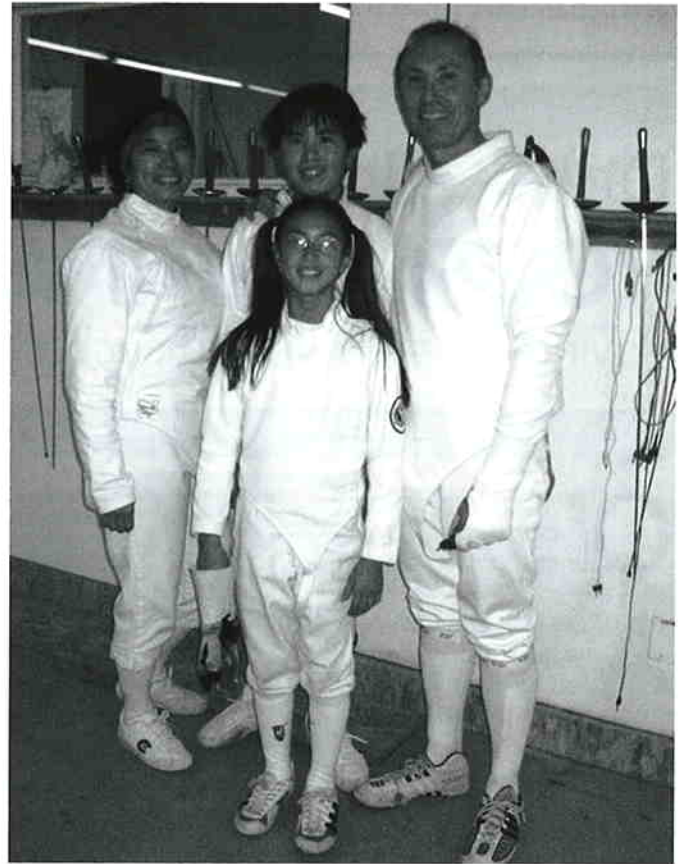
When **Bryan** (16) and **Rachel** (8) **Kim** began fencing, dad **Jai** did most of the driving to their practices and matches. Jai had competed in martial arts and was a black belt fighter when he was younger. Now of veterans age, he “missed competition,” so he started to fence. Most recently, he won a medal at Arlington, finishing eighth in VetMS. Still, Jai says, “my son wins our bouts regularly.”

The **Leighton** family of Mishawaka, Ind. also has its first exposure to fencing through the younger generation. **Louise** and **David's** two children, **Jim** and **Eleanor**, are now mainstays on the Princeton University fencing team. Louise says she “learned everything [she] needed to know about competitive fencing by watching and doing for my kids, except how to actually fence.” And then she learned to fence, well enough to finish third in a WEV40 event and seventeenth at this year's NAC in Palm Springs. David competes in the NACs and Summer Nationals, as well, and while he looks forward to better results, says “Intriguingly, the one decent fencer I can usually beat is Louise!”

**Joyce Jones** of New Hampshire's Wicked Cool Fencing Club has been fencing all three weapons in veterans events for several years. She took her son **Tristan** to his fencing lessons and competitions and noticed that “everyone was having a good time.” After a while, she was “tired of keeping score” and it was “too cold to run in the winter” in New Hampshire, so she began to fence. In 2003, Joyce was third in WSV40 at the Summer Nationals, and she competes regularly in NAC and other veteran tournaments, even in mixed events. She finds it “fun to fence with your kid,” and every once in a while “hit him over the head with a saber!”

**Karen Huntress** of Bedford, Mass., fences at Boston's Priz de Fer club. Her daughter was fencing and Karen “had to be there anyway,” so when a teammate was needed at a team event, she was drafted to fence saber. Since then, she has been a veteran fencer. Often we see her at the bout committee table at NAC tournaments.

One of our top women's saber fencers, **Delia Turner**, of Philadelphia, followed her daughter **Jessica** into fencing. Jessica started fencing at the Fencing Academy of Philadelphia when she was in fourth grade. Delia and her husband took turns driving her to practices and watching until it was time to take her home again. They thought it was a nice atmosphere, with interesting people. They liked the coach, and the way he dealt with their daughter.



Cynthia and Sean Ameli were lured into fencing by watching their children, Kain and NikNik. Photo courtesy Ameli family.

Delia thought it was a cool sport, though at the time she thought it was only for kids, since those were the only fencers she ever saw. After a couple of years, the coach announced a “parents day” in which they could go through the children's routine and find out what it was about. Delia explained that “he had us go through their warm-up routines, and games, and taught us footwork. At the end of the day, he suited us up, put epees in our hands, plugged us in, and had us face one of his top athletes, Mary Frye. I managed to hit her twice (you notice I still remember the details). I was hooked. I also had very stiff muscles the next few days. It was a very intense workout.”

One of the nicest things she experienced about fencing was the way she was welcomed into the ranks and found she wasn't even close to being the oldest one around. Moreover, “while adults may not improve as fast as their children do, they have the advantage of life experience, persistence and the ability to drive [them]selves to practice.”

Delia concludes that she knows quite a number of other fencers who started because their kids were fencing.

“In how many sports do parents get to be around their kids this way, as equal members of a community? I think it's better for kids if the rewards for parents don't lie solely in their children's performance. Kids need their own lives, and so do their parents.”

Certainly there are many, many more veteran fencers who also compete in tournaments, and there, too, their competitive kids are rooting for them. Let's go Mom and Dad!

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