

# Morizi Jiu-Jitsu teaches Hermiston to play “human chess”

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
NEWS EDITOR

Small towns can sometimes attract big talent, and Brian Morizi fits the bill.

Morizi studied Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu under Clark Gracie, grandson of the discipline’s creator, and was the first person to receive a black belt from him. His long list of titles include NoGi World Champion for the International Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Federation, three-time American National Champion, five-time American National NoGi Champion and three-time medalist at the World Professional Jiu-Jitsu Championships in Abu Dhabi.

He opened Morizi Jiu-Jitsu in Hermiston two weeks ago at 80872 N. Highway 395 and already has so many students he is looking at expanding his current offering of four kids classes and four adult classes per week.

“He’s one of the most technical fighters in the world,” said Allison Robins, a purple belt who graduated from top-ranked Gracie South Bay Academy. She acts as Morizi’s sparring partner during demonstrations and helps work with students.

She called Hermiston “extremely lucky” to have him. Robins convinced Morizi to open shop in Hermiston when she decided to move back there to be closer to family.

On Wednesday night as the children’s class drew to a close, 10 children were busy grappling in pairs on a large gray mat ringed by shoes and water bottles. The students — four girls and six boys in loose uniforms known as gis — were practicing how to get out from under an attacker pinning them to the mat.

“Get that knee up,” Morizi told students as he circled the mat correcting students’ technique. “Hold that leg.”

Afterward he told them that as some of them began entering competitions, the important thing was that they improved.

“I don’t care if you won or lost, I care if you tried your best, if you’re getting better,” he said.

During the adult class that followed, 21 men and women ran through drills for falling and rolling before pairing off and practicing



Staff photo by E.J. Harris  
**Instructor Brian Morizi, center, watches as students practice escape techniques they learned in class on Thursday at Morizi Jiu-Jitsu in Hermiston.**



Staff photo by E.J. Harris  
**Students Jada Longoria, 12, of Umatilla, and Zane Vogt, 13, of Hermiston, practice a hip escape technique Thursday at Morizi Jiu-Jitsu in Hermiston.**



Staff photo by E.J. Harris  
**Students watch as instructors Brian Morizi and Allison Robins demonstrate a bridge escape on Thursday at Morizi Jiu-Jitsu in Hermiston.**

specific moves. The students tended to gravitate toward partners roughly their same size and weight, but one of the strengths of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu — sometimes described as “human chess” — is that it teaches adherents to use larger and stronger opponents’ weight against them.

For that reason Morizi said it’s a great self-defense discipline, particularly for women and children. There isn’t punching or kicking involved. The focus is on leverage and technique, not brute force.

“It’s minimum force for maximum effect,” he said. “The smallest person can go as far as they want to.”

That doesn’t mean it’s not hard work. During Wednesday’s adult class sweat was pouring off of students by the end of the hourlong class and the windows to the outside had fogged up. Both Morizi and Robins said one of the great benefits to the sport is that people don’t realize how hard they’re exercising and how many different muscles they’re working out,

because they’re having fun and focused on outmaneuvering their opponent. Morizi said he lost 40 pounds when he started Jiu-Jitsu.

He said it’s also a great first sport for children, as it teaches them everything from how to fall without getting hurt to being able to gracefully handle losing to an opponent that has pinned them into submission.

“We have a lot of kids with really serious wrestling backgrounds that have come in,” he said.

Robins, who has a professional background in pediatrics and physical therapy, said she is paying close attention to make sure students stay safe while practicing. She said it was an interesting experience starting a new school because almost all of the students are at the same beginner level.

Aracely Urenda, one of Morizi’s adult students, said she joined his Jiu-Jitsu school because she wanted to learn self-defense skills.

“(Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu) was made by a guy who weighed 95 pounds,” she said. “He made it for people who are weaker to take down bigger people. I think that’s good for a lot of women to know.”

She said she had enjoyed her first two weeks of class and appreciated the exercise.

More than half of Morizi’s current class of adults are men. Jeremy Harris, another student, said Hermiston was “very blessed” to have Morizi. He said the opening of the Jiu-Jitsu school fit well into Hermiston’s strong wrestling history.

Morizi and Robins said beyond the physical benefits, Jiu-Jitsu is also a great confidence builder and social outlet. It’s hard to be shy around people you’re getting up close and personal with on the mat.

Morizi said many of his students told him they had been Googling “Hermiston Jiu-Jitsu” every few months in the hopes of finding a school opening near them. When he decided to come to Hermiston he had set a goal of at least 30 pre-registrations before opening, but after a little over a week ended up with almost 100 sign-ups.

Instead of paying on a per-class basis, Morizi Jiu-Jitsu students pay a flat fee to come to as many classes as they want per week. Currently classes are offered Monday through Thursday evenings, but Morizi plans to add more daytime and weekend classes.

He asks any interested students to try out one class for free before joining, to know what they’re getting into. They just need to come early dressed in workout clothes and sign a waiver.

For more information visit [morizijiujiitsu.com](http://morizijiujiitsu.com) or call 858-692-1468.

## Columbia River Health closing Umatilla pharmacy

By **JADE MCDOWELL**

Less than a year after purchasing Carlson’s Umatilla Drug, Columbia River Health is closing the pharmacy on April 30.

The organization hosted a celebration of the newly renamed Columbia River Pharmacy in November, but on April 4 announced on Facebook that it would be closing the pharmacy “due to circumstances beyond

our control” that made it “no longer feasible for us to operate a second pharmacy.”

“This has been a heart wrenching decision that has not come easily,” they wrote. “We care deeply for all of our patrons and recognize how this decision will affect each of them.”

The Boardman-based health provider also thanked Cathy Putnam, who had previously owned the pharmacy and had stayed on to

work as a pharmacist, and stated that they would help customers move their prescriptions elsewhere.

Columbia River Health did not return phone calls or an email requesting more information about the closure. They had previously announced plans to build a new clinic in Umatilla and eventually move the pharmacy into that building but

have not announced whether the closing of the pharmacy will have an impact on the plans for the clinic.

Several customers responded to the Facebook post by expressing their sadness at the news. Umatilla mayor Mary Dedrick wrote that the closure was a “huge mistake” on Columbia River Health’s part after the community had trusted them.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris  
**Cathy Putnam, behind the cash register, helps customers with their prescriptions in October of 2018 at Columbia River Pharmacy in Umatilla.**

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