

# California Small Business Development Centers

SUCCESS STORY # 653

*Small Business  
Success  
Is Our Business*

## Wellspring Aikido: Traditional Aikido Meets Modern Marketing

### Wellspring Aikido

Michelle & David Keip

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### BACKGROUND

Wellspring Aikido, founded in 2003 by Michelle and David Keip, offers traditional Aikido training for adults and teens, as well as a Samurai Sprouts program for children ages 5 to 7. David and Michelle have been teaching Aikido for more than 25 years. They met on the mat in 1983 and inspire students with their commitment to the “martial art of peace.”

Until 2009, Wellspring Aikido was run as a part-time business using rented shared space. Their goal was to take the Aikido school to full time operation and to expand the scope of the business to accommodate their vision of a movement and creative arts center.

### CHALLENGES

Struggling with all the aspects of acquiring a dedicated space brought the Keips to the SBDC. Previously, in 2003, they had come to the SBDC for assistance with startup issues and their need for an expansion plan brought them back.

They found the right space near their target customers; however it was in a light industrial park. Although the

location fit their requirements, it would require getting permission to locate a non-industrial business in a designated light industrial park. SBDC Business Advisor Herb Lieberman worked with them to navigate the city permit application process and to negotiate a lease agreement.

### ACTIONS

With space secured, the Keips were able to focus on launching Movement Oasis. This was a new venture for them and a new concept for Sonoma County. It required building a business model and developing a following from scratch. With the added burden of increased rent, they needed to ramp up revenue quickly.

The Keips met with SBDC Business Advisor Janet Wentworth to tackle how to run two different businesses (Wellspring Aikido and Movement Oasis), each with their own branding, out of a single physical location. They worked on the financial model to understand how to generate revenue through various services, and how to structure rental agreements for their instructors.

Marketing was a major initiative involving both printed and online marketing materials (creating a web site, understanding organic search, Google ads, email marketing, and a Facebook page).

### RESULTS

The couple moved to their new location, built out the space with volunteer labor, hosted a successful grand opening and just celebrated their first anniversary. Revenues have increased 55 percent over the prior year. Two instructors are now renting space for their own classes. More than 300 people have attended Movement Oasis events. The Keips have invested over \$11,000 from a home equity loan to support the business during this start-up phase, and one enthusiastic supporter is investing a fixed sum each month to keep programs going until the business is profitable.



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“ATTUNED TO CURRENT BUSINESS TRENDS AND KNOWLEDGEABLE OF THE FULL SCOPE OF SMALL BUSINESS CONCERNS, (OUR BUSINESS ADVISOR) HAS HELPED US WITH EVERY CHALLENGE WE’VE PRESENTED.”



(SBDC Photo/  
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