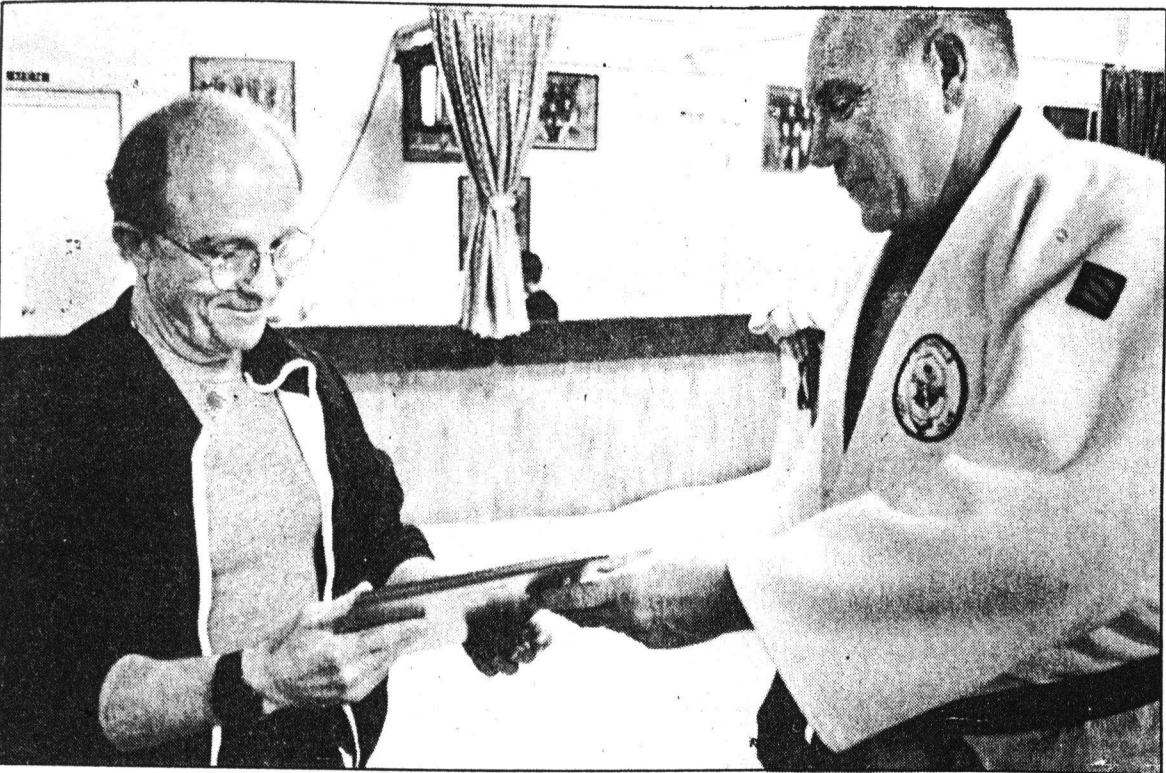


Fruitful friendship



Photos by Mike McCollum

Ron Tate (left) gets plaque from his friend Ferd Tihista.

It pays off for youth programs

By JUDY BRILL
STAFF WRITER

It will be several months before the city's new Youth Recreation Center is open for business, but there's one area ready to go right now, thanks to a San Jose businessman.

Real-estate developer Ron Tate recently donated a complete gym to the city's Recreation and Parks Department. Dumbbells, a squat/bench-press machine, benches, barbells and free weights are in storage, just waiting to move into their new home.

This is not the first time the city has been the object of Tate's big-heartedness. The 58-year-old has already donated \$7,500 over the last five years to the city's judo program.

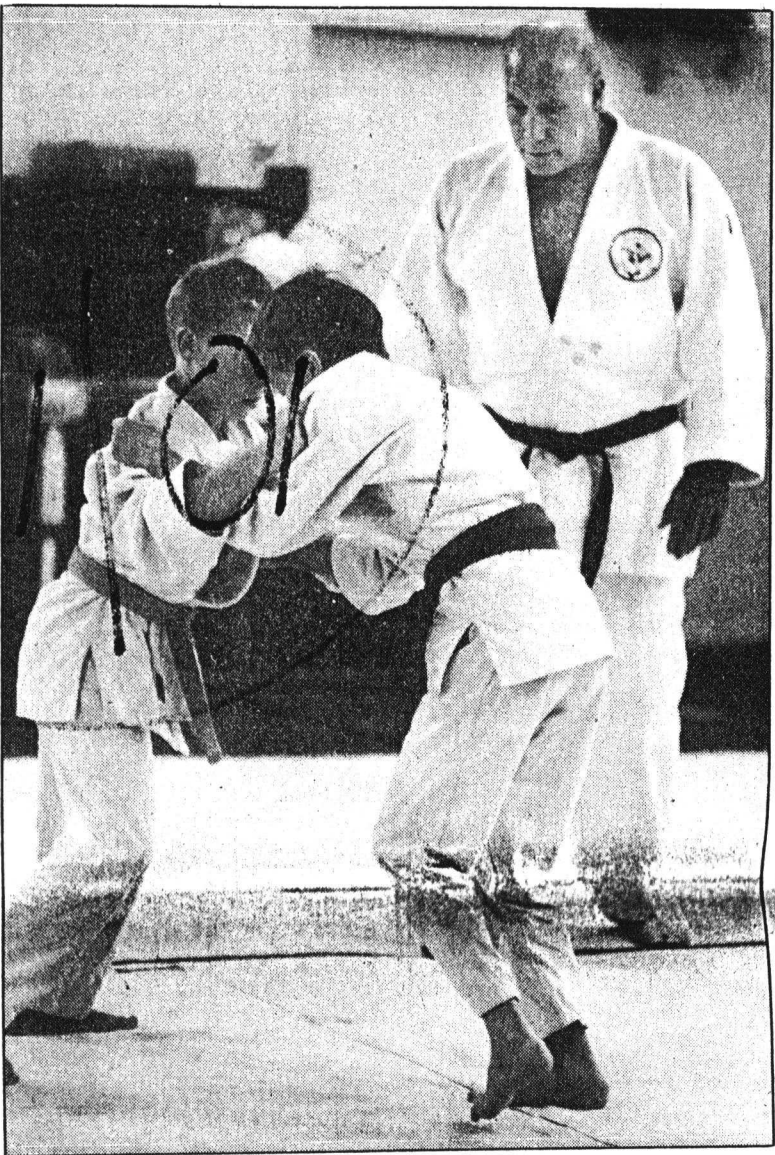
But Tate plays down his gifts, saying they have only been his way of showing his gratitude to Ferd Tihista, the Watsonville Judo Club instructor for the past 11 years.

"(Ferd) saved my life as a kid, growing up in Salinas," Tate explained. "I had a rough childhood. Most of the kids I knew are into drugs, in jail or dead by now. Ferd took me under his wing."

When Tate reached the ninth grade, he decided to abandon school in favor of pursuing a career in the health-club business. He worked for Vic Tanny for a while, then worked a couple of years in Salinas for Tihista, who also operated the Apollo Health and Modern Venus studios in Monterey and Santa Cruz, and four Texas facilities.

Tate eventually hung up that hat to try his hand at real estate. He's now president of Silicon Valley Companies, a multifaceted real-estate development firm that, among other projects, built the Pennsylvania Place housing off Main Street.

Tate said he always had it in his mind to pay Tihista back,



Tihista watches judo students perform.

and when Tihista offered to volunteer his experience and expertise to the city, opportunity knocked.

A fifth-degree black-belt karate master, Tihista, now retired, spent 30 years perfecting his skills. Eleven years ago, he offered to donate his time teaching kids judo if, in return, the city agreed to keep the classes free.

(The city now charges \$15 to join the club, but Tihista says, "that's not so much," and has gone along with the fee.)

In those 11 years, Tihista has elevated the city's youth pro-

gram, guiding his students to achieve the national competition level. He coordinates trips around the country for the judo meets, enlisting parents (and their financial assistance) for the excursions. But more often than not, Tate says, Tihista has dipped into his own pocket to foot the bills.

Their relationship is a mutual admiration society of two. Tihista warmly says of Tate, "He's just a super nice guy." Last week, Tihista took some time out from a regular judo class to present Tate with a plaque to make the thanks official.