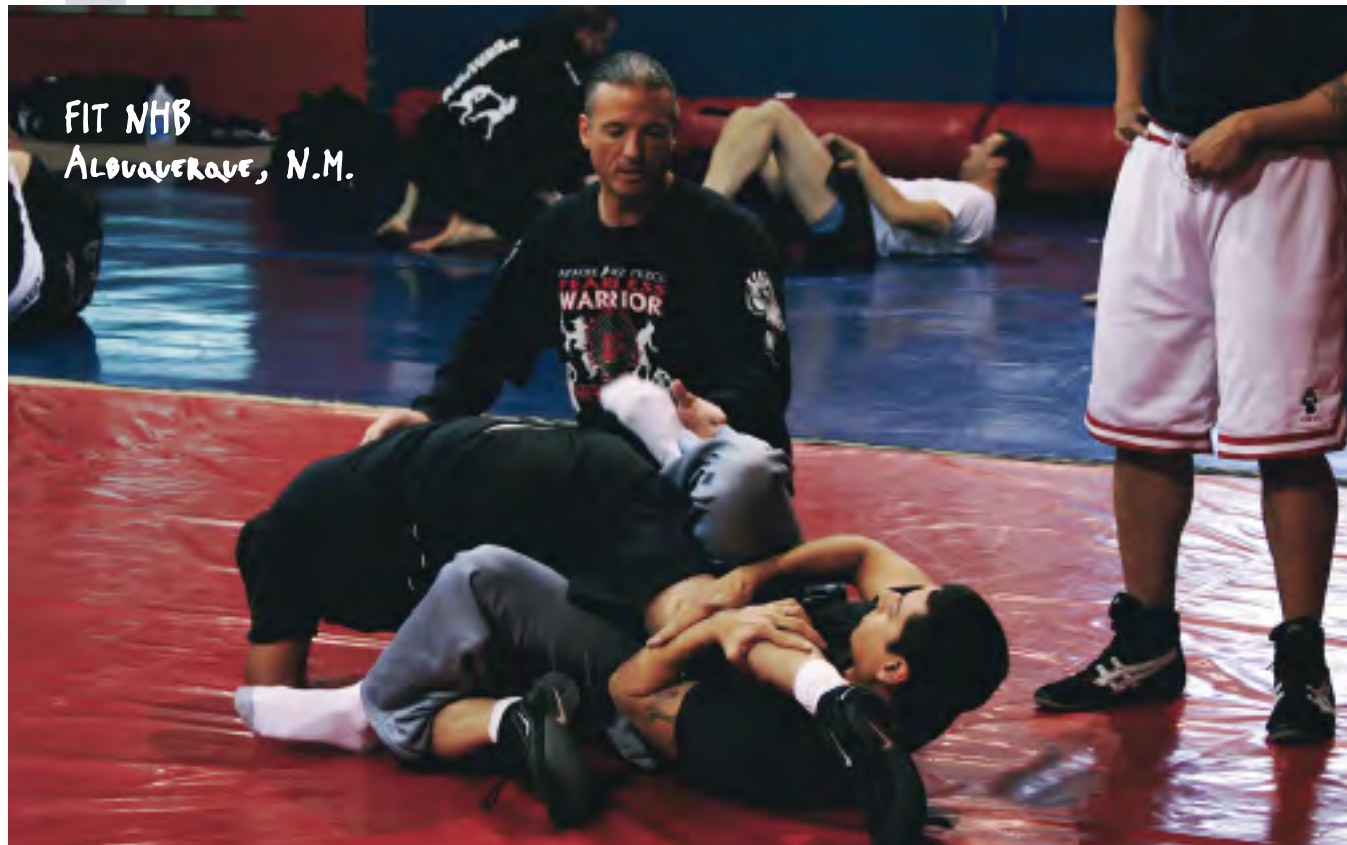


FIT NHB  
ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.



## The Other Side of the Tracks

FIT NHB IS THE  
LESSER-KNOWN  
MMA GYM IN  
ALBUQUERQUE...  
FOR NOW.

Written and photographed  
by Kelly Crigger

**After blazing a trail** that ushered in Westward expansion and established the spinal column of progress across 19th century America, railroads have taken a backseat to modern forms of transportation. In the days of glass-plate photographs, weary travelers disembarked steam trains in dusty, tumbleweed-infested towns and faced a choice of where to settle: the right side of the tracks or the wrong side.

Just a few miles from the Rio Grande, rail tracks continue to separate Albuquerque into east and west, providing journeymen MMA fighters who arrive by Amtrak the same classic choice. To the east is Greg Jackson's high-profile training center, Jackson's MMA. To the west, and within view of the tracks, is a warehouse that once stored barrels of salt pork arriving on the 5 o'clock special from San Antonio. That warehouse is now Fighters in Training No Holds Barred, known as FIT NHB.

### THE MILE-HIGH CLUB

FIT NHB is an expansive facility with an antique feel, laid out like a compartmentalized department store. Entering through what was once a loading dock, the newcomer finds himself wanting to shout, "Echo!" just to hear it bounce off the walls.

Academic institutions brag about small student-to-teacher ratios. With 11,000 square feet and only 80 students, FIT NHB can brag about its student-to-square-footage ratio. The sea of grappling mats is complemented nicely with new cardio and weight equipment, a ring, a cage, a heavy-bag area, a pro shop,

and even a big-screen entertainment system.

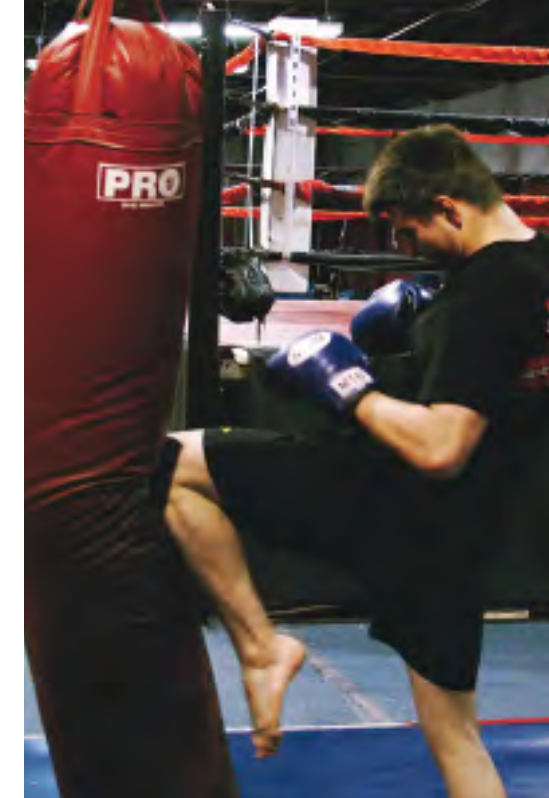
Owned and operated by Tom and Arlene Vaughn for the past five years, FIT NHB is both a gym for MMA enthusiasts and a competition fight club that takes advantage of the natural gift of high altitude. Albuquerque sits at 5,500 feet above sea level, so even the local paperboys can do three five-minute rounds. The area is a haven for cardiovascular endurance enthusiasts, with the multitudes of sand dunes ringing the city and the formidable Sandia Ridge that looms at 11,000 feet.

"It's here and it's free, so we'd be crazy not to use it to our advantage," Tom Vaughn says. "Just training here in the gym is higher than most people live."

Vaughn knows a thing or two about training. Before his ponytail turned gray, he operated a school on the other side of town under famed MMA coach Greg Jackson. With Jackson's blessing, Vaughn split and started FIT NHB alongside his wife, Arlene, a former professional kickboxer. At any given time, he can be found cruising the mats during a submission grappling or MMA class, his voice never rising above normal conversation when making a calculated correction. Although FIT NHB has other trainers, such as Craig Zellner and Jon Judy, the Vaughns are the primary instructors and are solely responsible for developing the FIT NHB curriculum.

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counter that," says WEC Welterweight Champion Carlos Condit. "As this game evolves and there's things coming out, I think we're on the cutting edge of things. Look at my fights. I'm known as a striker, and my ground has been proving superior to guys who are known as grapplers."

The Vaughns' philosophy is simple: provide a forum for safe and productive training and apply tailored programs for each individual. They understand that no two fighters are alike, and keep everybody on a certain path to success. That includes personal growth as well as professional skill development.

FIT NHB instructor Thomas Schulte (at right, top, and below, right) is only 26 years old, but has 23 pro fights, with all 17 wins coming by submission.

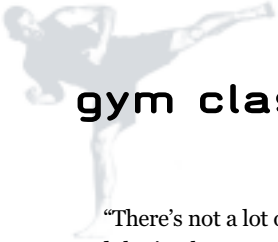


### SLOW-ROASTED FIGHTERS

"Check your ego at the door" might be an MMA cliché by now, but the description still fits. If an overinflated wannabe happens to get past the front entryway, he's quickly sized up and served with undeniable signs to get out of Dodge.

"It's not like we get a council together and tell them to get the f--k out; they weed themselves out. They just don't feel comfortable," says Tom. "The guys who are real pretentious go somewhere else where they can play that game, because here we will eventually call them on it."





# gym class

“There’s not a lot of ego running around this place, and that’s what I most like about it,” says young gun Thomas Schulte. “I don’t think anybody in here ever wants to be that guy: the dude who puffs his chest out and demands respect real loud because he hasn’t earned it. You won’t find that in here.”

The competition team at FIT NHB is rife with young talent like Schulte, many who are a couple of high-profile wins away from being household names. The Vaughns believe in grooming a fighter for as long as possible in amateur shows so he hits the professional ranks in a highly prepared state.

“The younger they are, the easier it is to keep them in an amateur status,” says Arlene. “So that’s why the younger ones are probably going to be our staple for a long time. Carlos has been with us since he was 15. He waited around and learned all the disciplines, which is probably why he is where he is today.”

When you sign up at FIT NHB, don’t think of using your kids, significant other or busy schedule as an excuse not to train. The Vaughns have circumvented every excuse in the book by providing free day care for kids, a big-screen TV to keep spouses and girlfriends entertained, and a robust schedule to accommodate everyone’s lifestyle.

“There are enough opportunities to come in and train during the day,” says wrestling coach Jon Judy. “There’s grappling eight times a week and stand-up six or seven times a week. Plus they do a good job separating out the people who need attention in various stages, so the beginners are with the beginners, and so on.”

But there’s one thing the Vaughns haven’t taken care of yet. Currently, the FIT NHB stable swelters in the heat of the Chihuahuan Desert. “I’d put a huge air conditioner in here,” Schulte says when asked what he would change if he could. “We have a hole in the roof that we open up, but it still gets really hot in the summer.”

That heat can be a powerful bonding force. After all, nothing brings a group of people together like a common adversity and the feeling of being the underdog. Both can be found on this side of the tracks. 🐾



### FIT NHB

**OWNERS:** Tom and Arlene Vaughn

**LOCATION:** 110 Lomas Blvd. NE, Albuquerque, NM 87102

**OPENED:** 2003

**MEMBERS:** about 80

**SQUARE FOOTAGE:** 11,000

**MAT SPACE:** 1,500 sq ft

**HEAVY BAGS:** 9

**RING OR CAGE:** Both

**FEATURES:** Weight and cardio equipment, pro shop, big-screen TV with projector

**ATMOSPHERE:** Huge and clean, but hot in the summer

**OPEN TO PUBLIC:** Yes

**CLASSES:** Submission grappling, MMA, boxing/kickboxing, kids’ classes

**TRAINERS:** Tom and Arlene Vaughn, Craig Zellner, Jon Judy

**CONTACT:** [www.fitnhb.com](http://www.fitnhb.com); (505) 833-3351; e-mail: [trainers@fitnhb.com](mailto:trainers@fitnhb.com)



Right: FIT NHB co-owners Tom “T.V.” Vaughn and his wife, Arlene, a former WKA professional kickboxing champion.