

THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT



(Left to right) Mike Katz, Jr., Mike Katz, Sr. and Jerry Mastrangelo
(Photo by Kathleen Cel)

Mike Katz, Sr. and Mike Katz, Jr., both graduates of SCSU, co-own several Planet Fitness gyms in New Haven County with SCSU alum **Jerry**

Mastrangelo. For them, education and fitness is a family affair.

Planet Fitness is expanding rapidly, with five locations in Hamden, Branford, East Haven, North Haven and Guilford, and was voted "Best Health Club" in the area six times by the *New Haven Advocate*.

In 1979, Katz, Sr. opened his first gym in Hamden, but he's well-known as a former professional body builder featured in the film *Pumping Iron* with Arnold

Schwarzenegger. He is a former New York Jets offensive guard and was named Mr. America, Mr. World and 1972 Mr. Universe.

He graduated in 1966 with a health and physical education degree and earned a master's degree and sixth-year certificate. He retired in 1999 from Hamden High School where he taught health education for 33 years. Mastrangelo – a 1980 SCSU graduate – also majored in physical education and health.

Katz, Jr. graduated in 1992 as a health education major, and then ran World Gym – which switched to Planet Fitness in 2004. The communication skills he learned at SCSU, he said, help with his job which is a combination of management, teaching and selling.

SCSU also offers the Mike Katz Endowed Football Scholarship and Katz Sr. sat on the Owl Club Advisory Board and received an Alumni Award.

"We started as three Southern grads with an elementary school background and good work ethic who learned the business as we went along," said Katz, Jr. "We worked hard, focused on opportunities and are proud we graduated from Southern."

Paul Pita, principal and executive creative director of Pita Group in Rocky Hill, has worked with his partner in life and business, Kim, for 15 years to grow a successful marketing business. In 1996, the company began as a boutique public relations and design firm. Today, it has grown into a full-service marketing agency with three divisions.

Pita graduated from Central in 1989 with a graphic design degree. He was working as a creative director when Kim started the company and asked him to work on a design project. When their first collaborative project was a success, they realized they had the talent and skill to work together.

pita | MARKETING
• group | INTERACTIVE
PRODUCTIONS

The company has grown to 23 employees and occupies a 10,000 square-foot studio in Rocky Hill with three divisions including Pita Marketing, Pita Interactive and Pita Productions. In 2006, Pita acquired Vrroomedia, adding a video production division that develops broadcast productions, interactive web experiences and animated graphics.

The company first focused on small and mid-sized businesses, but now has clients that include Aetna, UnitedHealth Group, Travelers and Union Savings Bank. Pita Group recently won a 2010 Family Business of the Year Award.

Pita, who is the first generation of Cuban parents, sits on the board of the United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut and the Boy Scouts of America, Connecticut Rivers Council. Pita maintains a connection with his alma mater, has hired three Central interns and meets with design students to share what they can expect in the real world.



Paul and Kim Pita