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RAISING SPIRIT WITH THE DOLLAR CLUB • KEEPING JAPANESE CULTURE ALIVE
Though Kazuyuki Abe has lived in the United States for 13 years and has taught at Western for the past seven, he has never forgotten his days as a guard for the emperor in Japan, and he lives in an effort to keep that heritage alive.

Story by Steve Thomas
Photos by Rick Musacchio

Herb Lowe, owner of Judy's Castle on 31W Bypass, has built a business from discipline, hard work and not a little sense of humor.

Story by Barry Rose
Photos by John Stewart

When a few friends in Kerr Hall decided just over a year ago to band together and drum up support for Hilltopper basketball, they hadn't planned on developing into a group of 30 men who paint their faces for ballgames and call themselves the $1.00 Club.

Story by Linda Lyly
Photos by Tony Rives
Calligraphy by Kazuyuki Abe
A small man in a black kimono paces nervously about the empty classroom.

A gold watch with a thick band peers from underneath the full sleeves. The silk kimono his father wore on his wedding day, it is too short for Kazuyuki Abe. At 5 feet 6 inches, he is slightly taller than his father.

His back is slightly hunched, and his white stockinged feet move in quick, short steps as he walks across the room. His woven thongs hit the floor rhythmically, becoming silent as he pauses to sit a collection of photographs on a desk by the window.

The reminders of his motherland include a paddle ball game similar to one he and his younger sister played as children, and a special package of rice cakes eaten on the eve of the Japanese new year.

Formerly a guard for Emperor Hirohito, Abe has been a part-time instructor in Japanese at Western for seven years, and a student—both full time and part time—since 1970. But now, his primary job is with the city as full-time supervisor of Bowling Green's landscape gardeners.

Abe's eight students begin filing into the fine arts center room noisily as he prepares to lead the class. They discuss the previous week's lesson and ask their instructor questions.

From his place at the front of the room, Abe peers at them over a mimeographed vocabulary list. Plastic-framed glasses slide down the bridge of his nose, and he pushes them back into place. Annoyingly, they slide down again.

"We have quite a lot of vocabulary we have to master," he says in the characteristic Japanese way of replacing r's with l's.

"IU...IU," he repeats carefully, looking from one student to another. "It's just like 'you,' but not exactly 'you.'"

He says the word again, and his students repeat it in unison. Abe paces in front of them, leaning forward slightly to hear their pronunciations. He is dissatisfied when their work isn't perfect.

Abe stares thoughtfully at his students as he goes over the lesson. Later, he says young people have changed since he came to the United States more than a decade ago.

"I can't say what the Japanese youngster is like," he said. "But youngsters here don't have to work so hard."

Parents provide everything for them, and they aren't motivated to work. Abe encourages young people—his students and those he supervises in his landscaping job—to put everything they've got into everything they do.

"Schools here emphasize individual development," he said. "But in Japan, I guess the group comes before the individual."
Japanese youth carry that attitude into the real world when they leave school to begin work, Abe said. When a Japanese man is asked what he does for a living, he replies with the name of a company, not that he’s a carpenter or a photographer. "What I do is not only my business," he said. "It will influence my group as well."

Abe tries to show his students the importance of learning Japanese. "The world is getting very small. Information is constantly going back and forth by machines — but it’s the people who are running them, so you have to understand other cultures."

Many people in Japan used to say, "If the United States sneezed, Japan would catch a cold," Abe said. "But now the country has caught up with the United States economically, and it would probably just start sneezing."

Abe said he hopes to help students understand his culture. "I hope I’m making them aware of what Japan is really like."

Twenty years ago, when Abe — who was born in Sunama, 350 miles north of Tokyo — was preparing to graduate from high school, his family suggested he take an exam to become a guard for Emperor Hirohito. If he succeeded, they told him, he would follow in the footsteps of an uncle who had held the prestigious position before World War I.

At 18, Abe had no long-term plans of his own and decided to take their advice. He never thought he would get the job, but by his 19th birthday, he was a member of the imperial guard, living in Tokyo.

Abe’s duties included checking the visitors who passed through the royal gate and acting as a bodyguard for the emperor and his family.

For a year before he began work, though, Abe lived on the palace grounds and was trained in constitutional law, police enforcement and the martial arts. Because he would be associating with Japan’s most elite family, he also took classes in poetry, floral arrangement, horseback riding and tea ceremony.

Abe’s first days as a guard for the emperor were difficult. "When you first encounter the family, you’re afraid," he said. "Later, you know what you have to do.”

Though the royal family often was seldom spoke to them.

He can still remember the one time he talked to Hirohito. A large flock of birds was flying around the palace grounds, and the emperor, or wondered, aloud what species would be so plentiful that time of year. Abe told him what kind, he thought they might have been.

His job with the emperor wasn’t always as easy as identifying birds. Every three days, the guards were required to work a 24-hour shift.

"Probably at night you could sleep an hour and a half to two hours and then you worked two hours."

Sleep two hours and work another two.

Along with the rigid work hours, guards were also required to put in three to six hours of martial arts practice each week. And when martial arts tournaments were held between the palace’s two guard stations, Abe was always chosen to represent his station. Though he didn’t like practicing, he put a lot of time into it.

"I didn’t like the idea of someone beating me," he said, his small frame still in good shape at 38. "So I guess I worked harder.”

After six arduous years as an imperial guard, Abe was getting restless. He needed to get away from the palace, and an American couple gave him the course.

As Abe worked at his station one day, he spotted a confused couple walking outside the gate. Thinking that maybe they were lost, he asked in broken English if he could help.

They wanted to see the emperor’s home; he gave them a tour of the grounds. Impressed with him, the couple invited him to visit them in their Oregon home.

"I thought again and again and decided finally my desire to see the United States was much stronger than my desire to stay in the palace guard," he said.

Abe stayed with the couple two months before moving on to Los Angeles. He wanted to learn to speak English — an opportunity he didn’t have in the small town.

He had taken English in high school but wasn’t able to speak it well because Japanese schools emphasize vocabulary and composition instead of conversation.

Abe’s first days in Los Angeles were marked with confusion. He found a job as a chauffeur for a prominent banker.

Abe was hired partly because of the reputable position he’d held in Japan.

Every day Abe chauffeured his employer to homes of celebrities such as Bob Hope and Bing Crosby. He remembers meeting singer Johnny Mathis and seeing Vice President Spiro Agnew at Bob Hope’s home.

"I remember Agnew was coming out of the house," he said. "But, of course, I didn’t talk to him.”

Abe stayed in Los Angeles for two years before growing tired of the city. He heard about Western from a Japanese whom he had studied English, and whose fiancé was a Western student. The brochures her fiancé sent impressed them both, and Abe decided to move to Bowling Green.

Abe came to Bowling Green in the summer of 1970 and started taking classes at Western that fall. He had earned a business degree by taking night classes while work-
ing for Hirohito. A master's degree in counseling, he decided, would help get him a job in industrial relations.

His first year in Bowling Green was difficult because he was still having trouble speaking English. And no one understood the Japanese culture — until he met sociology professor Kathy Kalab. Because she had studied at the University of Hawaii and had visited Japan, she was able to help him adjust.

"She helped me and I felt much better," he said. "Someone understood the culture — how Japanese behave and think. It's quite different."

Abe's friendship with Kalab blossomed, and they were married in 1974 — the same year he earned his master's degree. But after getting the degree, he couldn't find a job.

In the meantime, he took some classes at Bowling Green State Vocational School and read several books about plants. "I really liked working with plants and tried to understand why one kind is better than another."

Remembering the beautifully landscaped gardens of Hirohito's palace grounds, Abe decided he wanted to learn how to be creative with plants. In 1977 Abe again enrolled at Western — this time as a horticulture major.

Posters of colorful plants and flowers decorate the cubicle Abe shares with Carl Pitchford in the Bowling Green-Warren County Planning Commission office. Abe has traded his kimono for a pair of blue jeans and a green crew neck sweater. He sits at his desk choosing slides for garden club show as Pitchford, another city gardener, sits buried in a mass of paperwork.

Part of Abe's job includes speaking to groups about his gardening, and he proudly displays his work in slides. "I think a few trees or shrubs make a difference," he said.

Abe takes his job seriously. "Planting trees is like raising children. If you don't (care) for them, you can't expect them to become responsible adults."

Living in the United States for 13 years has Americanized Abe, but "still I have Japaneseess in my backbone," he says. "Sometimes I really want to eat typical Japanese food. But most of the time I don't have any preference either way."

Although he isn't a U.S. citizen, he has been granted permanent residency. "I'm happy to stay that way."

The rest of Abe's family is still in Japan — "Often I receive a letter saying, 'I wish you were here' from my parents," he said.

Although his parents had mixed feelings about his leaving Japan, Abe said, they've now accepted his decision to remain in the United States. They tell him, "As long as you're healthy and doing something good for society, that's OK," he said.

"I guess I've been lucky more or less. It didn't happen — any bad things — so far. But I don't know what's going to happen in the future."

Abe prepares a table in his home for an afternoon tea break. The snack included Yokan, a Japanese bean jelly.

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'Whadaya say Dingler?'

Story by Barry Rose  Photos by John Stewart

Left, when Bill Woolridge of the American Tobacco Company didn't believe Louie's age, he produced an old army pass and his social security card from his wallet to prove it. Judy's Castle opens for business at 5 a.m., and by six the counter is full of regulars.
Herb Lowe emerges from the small kitchen just after 6 a.m., wiping his hands on a white towel. He approaches two men sitting at the Formica-covered counter of his restaurant. He chooses a joke from the many he knows, and the two men’s laughter floats across the room.

The talk turns to politics, with Lowe giving a brief assessment of the previous week’s State of the Union address. He predicts that Howard Baker, the Republican Senate Majority Leader from Tennessee, won’t run for president in 1984, but is a likely candidate for 1988.

The chat completed, he strolls to a corner where a friend, a regular customer, sits.

“Whadaya say there, dinger,” he says to a young man, lifting a hand as he passes.

In the corner, he and an older man in a suit joke for a minute. When the man inquires about a mutual friend, they talk quietly for a moment before Lowe goes back to check business at the counter.

The good conversation and good food seem to come naturally to Lowe and to Judy’s Castle at the corner of 13th Street and the 31W Bypass. Lowe and his wife, Maxine, have operated the restaurant they named for their daughter since 1968, when they moved from another restaurant downtown in an effort to slow down.

Their daughter, Judy, a Bowling Green junior, often helps out at the restaurant and says she may one day take over the family business.

Mrs. Lowe met the man who is now her husband when he hired her as a waitress at the College Street Inn, the restaurant he opened in 1946 at the corner of Third and College streets. Later, she bought half the business.

“She says I tricked her into buying half the business,” Lowe said.

“Then I tricked her into marrying me,” Lowe, 72, said he isn’t sure why he and Maxine didn’t publicize their wedding. “We got married during lunch,” he said, “went out and bought a couple of movies, ate a barbecue sandwich and drank a beer, and went back to work that evening.”

Her wife, somewhat embarrassed, confirms the story. She’s from much the same mold, as her husband, raised on hard work during the Depression. It is perhaps from his disciplined background that Lowe, tough exterior.

In November, 1960, that toughness was tested.

Lowe had been called to the scene of an accident at the intersection of First and State streets near the Barren River. He says he still doesn’t know why he was called instead of the police, except that he worked nearby and was relatively well-known.

After looking over the accident scene, Lowe attempted to cross the street to the police station.

He was struck by a tractor-trailer at what was then the busiest intersection in town. “They didn’t think I was going to make it through the day,” he said, “but I guess I had somebody with me. The old human body can take a lot if you want it to.”

“It hurt for every minute for 24 hours a day,” he said. “But it’s still nice to be alive.”

He bears no scars, physical or mental, from the accident. His face, framed by a short haircut and sagging skin, would more appropriately fit a man of 50 or younger. With each joke he tells, his eyes take on a childlike glitter.

His hands, though marked with age spots, work deftly as he counts change at the cash register or adds ingredients to a kettle of stewed apples in the morning. His short, stocky frame easily carries the large kettle to a gas stove, and he gently blows on the burner when the flame refuses to respond to the pilot light.

Lowe believes hard work— he’s been working the restaurant business without a vacation since he got out of the Air Force in 1946— keeps him young. “I think more people have hurt themselves by worrying than they have by working. I like to work. I like to get things done.”

His daughter, 22, is amazed at her father’s youthfulness. “That’s what keeps him going,” she said.

His life is his work. I think that’s what keeps him going.

Lowe arrives at the remodeled brick building at about 3 a.m. to check his kitchen. “I don’t want to come too early. The breakfast rush that will come two hours later. A kettle of beans is soaking where his wife left them when she left at about 8:30 the night before.

He works slowly and steadily, pausing sometimes for a cup of coffee. “I’m used to getting up early a lot of mornings. Coffee, that’s why I keep going.” If coffee is a vice, it’s his only one. He gave up cigarettes, and says distilleries would have to shut down if everybody drank as little as he did.

After working at the restaurant until about 8 a.m., he leaves in his van to begin his other business of the day, a vending and amusement company that operates within a 60-mile radius of Bowling Green— including many of Western’s fraternity houses.

At the end of the day, he’ll drift into sleep while reading the newspaper in the recliner at his home. His wife, who closes the restaurant, will wake him and put him to bed — his alarm sometimes goes off just as she is beginning to sleep.

The long days and hard work come easily to Lowe, the youngest of eight children born to C. S. and Ada Lowe on a farm south of Smiths Grove.

He remembers getting up with the sun, taking care of chores around the house before breakfast and then spending the day in the field, returning to the house as the sun became a golden ball of fire on the horizon.

“My Daddy was a firm believer in getting up and working. It’s not like now, having these coffee breaks and all that stuff,” he said.

He also reminisces about a childhood playmate, John Wesley, who somehow acquired the nickname “John Dinger.”

“So I started calling people ‘dinger’ and everybody started calling me ‘dinger.’” A sign reading “Dinger’s place,” given Lowe by a friend, hangs in the restaurant.

He remembers that, during the Depression, farmers wouldn’t make enough from their tobacco to pay the cost of selling it. The government stepped in to subsidize it, paying the floor cost. “They’d hold, ‘Sold to Hoover,’ ” he said, recalling that an angry farmer once kicked an auctioneer in frustration, halting sales locally for three days.

“Yes, the young generation can’t picture what it was like then.”

Before joining the Air Force, he went to work operating an ink press on sugar bags at the Bemis Bag Company in Indianapolis, Ind. He made 37 cents an hour, and paid $5 a week for room and board.
Dingler

During World War II, he became a ground crewman at a B-29 installation in Kingston, Jamaica.

"Sometime before I get too old, I'd like to go back for a couple of weeks," he says. His wife and daughter often take vacations, but Lowe has always stayed behind. "I don't get to travel and take off like I'd like to. It might be wrong, but you've got to take care of business."

Five days after getting out of the service in 1946, he opened the College Street Inn, which he operated until moving to the Castle on the bypass.

Judy was raised in the College Street Inn, the family living next door. She remembers playing with the cash register, being asked to square dance with college students and sipping an occasional Shirley Temple.

"For a long time, that was the hangout for Western students," her father said. "The bypass wasn't even thought about back then."

Fewer than 1,000 students attended Western then, and he knew many of them by name.

He especially remembers Ed Diddle, Western's basketball coach from 1922 to 1964. Diddle used to bring the team to the Inn for dinner, with either Diddle or Lowe picking up the tab.

Diddle, Lowe said, was good at offering advice.

He came into the restaurant one day, Lowe said and told Lowe the name of a horse he should bet on in a race. "I said, 'Mr. Diddle, I've never bet on a horse in my life.' But he and a friend put a small wager on the horse through a bookie operating downtown. The horse won.

Lowe has passed up other investment opportunities that would have made him much richer, much sooner. "If a feller's headlines were as good as his taillights, he'd be in business," he quips.

There are many stories in the man who says he has probably worked more in one lifetime than most people have in three.

In 1955, Lowe and his wife cooked for a picnic sponsored at Beech Bend Park for gubernatorial candidate Happy Chandler. Lowe claims they cooked 10,000 pounds of meat, feeding more than 30,000 people.

"There wasn't a piece of anything left," he recalls, "but I wouldn't go through it again for a crisp $1,000 bill." Chandler was dripping sweat at the end of that hot summer day after shaking hands with everyone there, but he won the governor's race that fall.

Lowe hopes the stories and the people — and the business — will be passed on to his daughter.

The odds look good. One of her goals, she says, would be to keep the place open a little later than 8 p.m., and she and her mother have discussed adding more space to the building in which they had originally planned to slow down.

But, she hesitated, "Whether I'm going to work as hard as he has, I don't know."
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Just a bunch of guys trying to raise spirit

Leonard Silox takes his makeup seriously.

Tracing a design in eyebrow pencil, the Louisville sophomore colors a white circle on his cheek and marks the inside with a red W. Following the outline, he adds more white spots to his nose.

As he applies the streaks to his own face, Silox helps create similar designs on the faces of two of his friends. For each of them, the meticulous operation takes about an hour.

They may look like clowns preparing for the circus, but Silox and Lautner's destination is Diddle Arena and, to them, their objective is no laughing matter.

Last year, Louisville freshman Don Morrison and John Hartmann and Evansville freshman Greg Myers — along with a few friends — decided it was time to put the school spirit back into basketball.

They began to attend Western's games regularly, sitting together and shouting the kind of enthusiasm they thought unusual among college basketball fans. And so the $100 Club, in a spoof of the Hilltopper Hundred Club, was born.

A year later, just before last fall's Western basketball season began. the group — known as the $100 Club — the group informally organized itself. Its members painted their faces at ball games and charged their dues of $1. At the time, they say, it just seemed like the thing to do.

And now it's with almost unspoken enthusiasm that they plan to take the club to the next level, which now includes 30 sets of uniforms, 15 pairs of red shoes and 150 pairs of red socks — in an effort to generate greater fan support.

"It was a group decision to paint up," Morrison says. "It was a way to get instant support."

The group's main goal, he says, was simply "to go make noise" — to make up for a crowd they thought was too silent.

"Last year we had four or five guys who went to a game, and the crowd was pretty thin," Morrison says. "So we decided to live things up. We were really just a bunch of guys trying to raise spirit."

Mark Gary, a Morgantown freshman, says he joined the group because he loves school spirit. "I wanted people at our high school to do it. I wanted fans at our games." Gary says, "but I couldn't find anyone that would."

"When we're out there cheering for the team, we're literally No. 1 fans," Gary says. "We try to give our friends support.

Mark Gray, a Morgantown freshman, has his face painted before the University of Evansville - Buckingham game. He was one of about 20 club members who "painted" for the game.

from story by Steve Thomas

would be drinking and everything, and we would have a lot of trouble out of them," Healer recalled.

But "They're really nice guys," he said. They are real co-operative. Anything you tell them, they do it. They had a horn at one of the games blowing it, and when we asked them to stop using it, they did. Western needs a lot of people like that."

Club members acknowledge the compliments they've received, and say that though garnering praise isn't their primary objective, it's always good to meet with approval.

"It makes you feel like, 'Wow, somebody noticed us,'" Gary said.

Silox said he'd also gotten encouragement from a number of people.

"I had a guy, about 70, walk up to me after the last game and say he really liked what we were doing," Silox said. "It really made me feel good."

The club likes to get the crowd involved at the game. They say if they can accomplish that, they've done their job.

"When the crowd joins in with us, we have fun," Morrison said. "We want to get them involved."

Myers said the main reason for having the club is to generate support for the basketball team.

"We're not there to get all the publicity for ourselves," Myers said. "We're there for the team."

Lester Hagan, a freshman from Santa Claus, Ind., agrees. "It's not every game that we're going to win," he said. "But they need that fan support to keep it close. If we could get more fan support, our team would be awesome."

The game gets under way and the group has gathered in the upper section of the bleachers.

In preparation for tipoff, the group begins a chant: "Dollar Club, Dollar Club."

A few seconds into the game, Western's Tony Wilson scores the first points. "TWA."

At one point the team's mascot, Big Red, runs up the bleachers and toward the group. He waves a poster that says "The $100 Club." Laser freshman Brad Hanks and Matt Peterson, a freshman from Battle Creek, Mich., arrive wearing suits, neckties and dark glasses that would rival the costumes in any John Belushi Dan-Aykroyd film. They say they've dressed in an attempt to "appeal to the most dedicated fans."

The men try to entice a dull point in the game by running wildly around the arena's middle bleachers, howling and slapping hands as they pass.

Bowing Green Junior High School students Jason Dietrich and Ray ocasional paint their faces with No. 1 eye makeup and sit near the $100 Club at games. Dietrich said he does it because "I like Western and I like what they're doing.""
Though the club has grown over the past year, members of the club are skeptical about increasing their membership or obtaining student organization status.

"Right now we can control it pretty good," Morrison said. "If the club was to grow, we might not be able to control it ourselves."

Nevertheless, the men don't hesitate to invite other fans to sit with them and cheer during games. Among those who regularly sit with them are 20 to 30 school-age children.

Morrison said the group won't confine its enthusiasm to men's basketball, but plans to drum up support at some of the Lady Topper's games and, come spring, at baseball games.

Dick Johnson, of Bowling Green, graduated from Western in 1971. When he attended Western, a number of groups yelled at games -- but most were fraternities, and none painted their faces.

"We ought to have more people like them (the club)," Johnson said. "They create good crowd enthusiasm."

Not everyone, however, is ready to jump on the $1.00 Club's bandwagon.

Dwight Treadway, a Bowling Green factory worker who said he's been a Western fan for 26 years, said he thinks the club is taking over a job that belongs to the cheerleaders.

"I do think we need more people yelling," Treadway said. But, he said, the club doesn't follow the cheerleaders. "It's got people confused on who to follow on the cheers.

"They should work with the cheerleaders," he said. "But not try to take it over."

Varsity cheerleader Perry Hines, a Drakesboro junior, disagreed. "I don't think it's their purpose to take over," he said. "We're glad someone's up there. A lot of times the crowd is dead.

"The crowd responds a lot better to people in the stands than with people on the floor," Hines said. "Western needed someone of that type."

With only seconds to go, the game looks hopeless for Western. But the $1.00 Club remains loyal.

"We'll be back, win or lose," one member shouts.

Despite Western's 68-66 loss, Silon vows to never give up. "We'll keep coming back until they close the doors on us."
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