

# NJ Fencing Academy first to reopen amid COVID

*Owner of a fencing school in Princeton, NJ, tells how she worked with state and local administrations to reopen during COVID-19 shutdowns and restrictions.*

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EINPresswire.com/ -- "What's my line?" Indeed! Though sport fencing may not readily come to mind to most of us when we think of athletics, in New Jersey, it's one of the top high school sports. In fact, New Jersey is home to the two largest one-day competitions in the USA, namely the Cetrulo for young men and the Santelli for ladies

in which some 58 New Jersey High Schools are represented by 9 competitors each at these two world-class events. Nevertheless, Gabrielle Roux, owner, and coach at Sebastiani Fencing Academy in Princeton had quite a bit of explaining to do upfront in attempts to gain the appropriate permits to reopen.

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Coronavirus has changed the terms on which we must now practice our sport, and challenged the spirit of camaraderie and fellowship which is such a large part of many competitive and club sports.”

*Gabrielle Roux*

It's a school! It's a gym! It's a... fencing academy? "What's that??" That being no small task on its own, once clarified, Gabrielle then commenced navigation through the various steps of New Jersey's process to procure a reopening permit well ahead of Governor Murphy's Green Phase. In the face of vastly restructured operations guidelines, she found herself caught between wanting to protect her students and staff, but also needing to reopen in order for the school to survive. She turned her attention to what was possible to achieve her main goal of a safe

environment as she knew there must be a way to embrace the new safety guidelines and still provide adequate training levels. In short, a new normal! In anticipation of [S.F.A.'s annual summer camps](#), she decided to submit a detailed reopening protocol in petition to her local



Students line up in fencing gear with masks during a saber class.

township, as well as to the State of NJ, to get the process moving.

After many phone calls, emails, and inspections, she was finally granted her license to reopen on June 22nd. Inspections and permits included a fire safety permit, an expanded certificate of insurance, certification from the NJ Department of Health approving [S.F.A.'s proposed training guidelines](#) in accordance with current disease controls, as well as additional approvals from the landlord, township inspectors, and fire marshals regarding canopy installation in the rear parking lot for outdoor training. Finally, full disclosure and distribution to participants regarding any remaining risks and the mandatory signing of a "Post COVID-19 Waiver". Whew.

She focused on safety and the established protocols suggested by our nation's top epidemiologists along with state and local guidelines. Through its leadership, New Jersey has proven to be one of the more successful states in controlling the spread of Covid-19, and Sebastiani Fencing Academy is determined to do its part. Distancing, masks, limited attendance, hand washing, no outside visitors or spectators, temperature checks, continuous sanitation, outdoor classes, are just some of the procedures in place. Many of the students' parents are medical doctors and all have praised Gabrielle's tireless efforts to provide the safest environment for their children.

I asked Gabrielle what she was most looking forward to when she opened her doors. She responded, "Honestly, I'm just so happy to see the sport I love most living on through my wonderful students, and am equally happy for them that they are again able to practice in person, as teammates and colleagues. Especially now, these are kids who've been cooped up for months!" Given that most fencers have annual contracts and have missed out on months of training, Ms. Roux felt compelled to honor S.F.A.'s obligations by issuing as much makeup training and flexibility as reopening will allow. Gabrielle says there's been a tremendous



Before suiting up, outdoor conditioning. This New Jersey fencing academy took great efforts to get approval from state and local townships not only to reopen, but also to install a canopy to facilitate outdoor training activities.



Social distancing in class setting. Despite social distancing measures, students still receive effective personalized group and individual training.

response from parents expressing their gratitude and support in appreciation of all her efforts. Hers is currently one of very few such businesses to resume classes and training in New Jersey, including the NY, NJ, & PA tri-state area.

"The reopening was for sure a series of hurdles, but for everyone's safety they each had to be cleared. In the end, it was worth it!", says Gabrielle. "We're compliant and we're back to work!" So even though "SFA" is a contraction for a Fencing Academy who is named for its [founder, Michel Sebastiani: French Olympian, US Olympic Coach](#), and indeed mentor to so many students over some 50 years of teaching, SFA could also stand for the "Safest Fencing Academy" on the planet!

#### Upcoming Events:

S.F.A. Fencing Summer Camps (registration required). Five days of fun and intensive fencing instruction and bouting. Indoor/outdoor (weather permitting). All ages, levels, and weapons (Saber, epee, and foil). Half and full-day options.

When: Every week in July and August, beginning July 6th

Location: 741 Alexander Rd, Princeton, NJ 08540

Time: Full days- 9 am - 3:30 pm M-F

Half days- 9 am - Noon M-F

Contact Sebastiani Fencing Academy or visit their website for more details.

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