

Norm Cates'
CLUB INSIDERTM
The "Pulse" of the Health, Racquet, and Sports Club Industry
Established 1993

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Prairie Life Fitness

A Smart Balance of Fitness and Fun

APRIL 2010

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Norm Cates' CLUB INSIDER™

The "Pulse" of the Health, Racquet, and Sports Club Industry

Established 1993

Prairie Life Fitness

A Smart Balance of Fitness and Fun

By: Justin Cates

Fitness can be fun! And, you can never be too young or too old to have too much fun. At Prairie Life Fitness, Dean Rasmussen has built a culture of making it fun in his clubs, not only for his members but for his employees. Prairie Life Fitness strives to be a smart balance of fitness and fun, providing "Fitness for the Entire Family," and fulfilling the mission, "To meet the health and fitness goals of members and guests in an environment that is friendly, clean, welcoming and enjoyable for all ages." Prairie Life itself is a family-owned and

operated business, so these aren't just words. That clearly comes across throughout their ten fitness centers, operating across four states (Kansas, Iowa, Nebraska and Tennessee).

Dean Rasmussen, Founder and CEO of Prairie Life Fitness, was born and raised in Lincoln, Nebraska. He attended the University of Nebraska and graduated in 1967. With his wife, Jessie, he has two daughters, Jennifer (Mahlendorf) and Janine, as well as three grandchildren. In fact, you will actually hear from his daughter, Jennifer, later in this story, as she is Prairie Life's Director of Sales and Marketing.



Speaking about his daughter's role in the business, Dean had this to say, "I have been fortunate, but we as a business have been fortunate to bring Jennifer and her experience into our business just within the last three years as our Director of Sales and Marketing. Jennifer has brought a lot of new ideas, being younger and a different thinker, with regards to

where we need to go as opposed to where we have been, which as someone who has been in the industry for as long as I have has a tendency to do. So, from the standpoint of understanding the importance of branding and sticking to the mission and focus of what we do, she has brought a lot to the table."

Having also been in-

involved in family businesses for as long as I can remember, this sentiment rings deep with me. The bond of family is important, and that importance cannot be overstated. Maybe not all families are meant to build businesses with each other, but those that do understand the importance of trust, as well as having respect

(See *Prairie Life* Page 8)

Norman L. Cates, Sr. Passes Away at 92

December 27, 1917 - April 6, 2010

By: Norm Cates, Jr.

Norman L. Cates, Sr., 92, joined our Lord on April 6, 2010. He passed away due to complications from a severe accidental burn on his right leg that happened at his home on January 31, 2010. He was treated at the LSU Burn Center in Shreveport, Louisiana and Saint Joseph's Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia.

Norman L. Cates, Sr. was born in Linden, Texas on December 27, 1917. He was the only son of Henry T. and Eula Mae Cates. He was pre-deceased

by his sister, Mary Ingram and his brother-in-law, Sam Ingram of Sun City, Arizona and his son, Allen Gene Cates. He is survived by his sons, Norman L. Cates, Jr. and David Lee Cates of Atlanta, Georgia; his sister Melba Kelley of Forth Worth, Texas; his grandson Justin Cates of Atlanta, Georgia; his granddaughter, Renee Petty of Jacksonville, Florida; and his great grandchildren, William and Hunter Petty and his daughter-in-law, Ilena Cates of Atlanta.

Cates was an athlete in high school and played football as an end. He was also a boxer.

He grew up during the Great Depression. He joined the Army in 1935 at age 17 and became a cavalryman, one of America's last soldiers on horseback. That suited him just fine because he had grown up around and loved horses. In his early military years, he was a fierce competitor in boxing until he dislocated his right thumb while throwing a punch. He asked for and got a transfer from the Army into the Army Air Corps, where he first experienced aviation, a field he would be in for the rest of his working days.

Later on, his 5th Air Force, 13th Bomber Squadron trained in Savannah, Georgia prior to their overseas tour in the Pacific during World War II. They traveled by train from Savannah to San Francisco where they boarded the USS Ancon for a 30-day voyage across the Pacific that took them to Australia with their final destination being the island of New Guinea. Cates was a top gunner and flew on thirty-seven B-25 bombing missions. He was the Squadron First Sergeant while in New



Norman L. Cates, Sr.

(See *Norm Cates, Sr.* Page 6)

Inside The Insider

- **The Right Team - By:** Will Phillips
- **Launch A Summer Referral Promotion Now! - By:** Chris Russo
- **Becoming an "Inclusive" Industry - By:** Sandy Coffman

- **Apex Fitness Introduces bodybugg® mobile!**
- **Orchard Hills Athletic Club Receives 2010 Business of the Year Award**

Norm's Notes: • May Norman L. Cates, Sr. Rest in Peace • Anytime Fitness Opens 1,300th Location • Where in the World is Shane Franklin? • Robert Giardina (re)Named President and CEO of Town Sports International • Thomas Plummer Releases New Book • Thank you to IHRSA2010 Exhibitors • Apex Fitness Launches bodybugg mobile • Visual Fitness Planner Remains Strong • Club Industry East - May 5-7 in New York City • Green Valley Athletic and Tennis Club Honored • Congratulations to Randy Hedrick • Sandy Coffman on NuStep • Congratulations to Tim Richards • Colin Milner Continues Innovation at the International Council on Active Aging • Wally Boyko's NFTJ Conference and Trade Show - August 19-21 in Reno • John Stransky Resigns from Life Fitness • Low-Price Clubs • "How to Produce Boot Camps" • Best Wishes to Dale Dibble

Norm's Notes

•**Hello Everybody!** This is your **CLUB INSIDER Publisher and Tribal Leader** since 1993 checking in! **Spring** is everywhere, and here we go with another case of dancing fingers on this keyboard.

•**America! Is America a great country** or what? **Hmmm... Hmmm... Hmmm!**

•Last month, in **Norm's Notes**, I mentioned that I'd write and publish an article this month, in honor of **IHRSA's** upcoming **30th Anniversary**, a **Page #6 "Insider Speaks"** article entitled **"Imagine Our Industry Without IHRSA!"** This article will review the health club industry before IHRSA and what has happened since IHRSA began, listing **10 positive differences IHRSA** has made in our industry. These are differences that would disappear should IHRSA not continue its current success. Well, I must postpone that article until next month because of the following news. My **Dear Dad** lost his fight for life, a 9-week battle that began on January 31st when he accidentally burned his right leg while building a fire in his wood-burning stove in his family room, something he had done safely

thousands of times before. After his great struggle, Dad finally passed away on the morning of **April 6, 2010 (See Page #3)**. I want to thank everyone who reached out to me and my family by sending flowers to us at home and to his funeral, calling and sending cards, letters and emails. All of you have honored me by remembering him with your kind expressions of condolences to our family. Our family is very sad to have lost this great man... but he had a terrific life of 92 years until his unfortunate accident, and we're grateful that we've had him here on Earth for so long to enjoy time with him and learn from him all of these years. May my Dad, **Norman L. Cates, Sr., Rest In Peace.**

•**Anytime Fitness** has announced that they now have 1,300 locations open worldwide. Since the U.S. is well-established by **Curves, Anytime Fitness, Snap Fitness, Planet Fitness** and other franchises, the Anytime folks have headed overseas and now have locations in **India, Mexico, the U.K., Ireland, Luxembourg** and the **Netherlands.**

•Has anybody seen or heard from **SHANE FRANKLIN** lately? If

you have, give me a heads up at **Norm@clubinsideronline.com** so I can warn the club owners in the region where he might be setting up another bogus pre-sale! Our industry needs to be on this guy like a dog on a pork chop! While I was at **IHRSA 2010** in San Diego, I got a threatening telephone call from somebody which was very garbled, and the only words I could hear well enough to make out were, **"You are making a target out of yourself."** I suspect it might have been Franklin. So, to the party, be it Franklin or not, who called me and threatened me, I assume to try to scare me, you better try again because your voice mail sucked and I couldn't understand it enough to get scared. **So, go ahead... make my day... and try to scare me again.**

•**ROBERT GIARDINA** has been named by the **Board of Directors of Town Sports International Holdings, Inc. (TSI)** to replace **ALEXANDER ALIMANESTIANU** as **President and Chief Executive Officer** of the company. Can anybody tell me if this is not déjà vu all over again!? Aha! I found it. This from TSI:

Robert Giardina, 52, originally joined TSI in 1981 and served as President and Chief Operating officer from 1992 to 2001. He later served as Chief Executive Officer from January 2002 through October 2007. In response to his new appointment, Giardina

said, "I am excited to rejoin TSI and look forward to helping the company fortify its position as a premier operator of fitness clubs."

•**THOMAS PLUMMER**, part of the **NFBA Alliance Team** (See **NFBA Ad on Page #23**), has written another book entitled, **"Where Did That Member Go? Rediscovering the Lost Art of Customer Service."** This book is about rediscovering the lost art of member service and then implementing it in your business. The goal of this book is to move toward building a business that retains its clients through the creation of legendary customer service. Check out the **Ad on Page #15** with information on Plummer's new book.

•Last month, I produced a fairly thorough report on **IHRSA 2010** in **San Diego**, but one thing I didn't do was to list and thank the sponsors of **IHRSA 2010**. **CLUB INSIDER** **Thanks Them**, and they are:

American Council on Exercise; American Specialty Health; Anytime Fitness; Aon Affinity Insurance Services; ASF International; Balanced Body@Pilates; Body Media; Concept2 CTS; CSI Software; CYBEX; dotFIT, LLC; Ergoline; Fiserv; Fitness Anywhere, Inc. (TRX@); Fitness Brazil; Fitness Industry Canada; Freemotion Fitness; Global Gym; Go Figure, Inc.; GOJO Industries; Gold's Gym International; GP Industries,



Norm Cates

Inc.; GRAVITY® by efi Sports Medicine®; Healthy Learning; In Touch Technology, Inc.; Intel Corporation; JumpSport, Inc.; Leisure Industry Week; Les Mills International, Ltd.; Mad Dogg Athletics; Mastercard Worldwide; Matrix Fitness; MINDBODY; Motionsoft; NuStep, Inc.; Parisi Franchise Systems; Partnership Capital Growth, PFP Personal Fitness Professional; Philadelphia Insurance Companies; Polar Electro Inc.; Power Plate; Precor Inc.; Sport Managers Servicios Integrales; SPRI Products, Inc.; StairMaster; STOTT PILATES®; Technogym®/Technogym USA Corp.; The Green Revolution, Inc.; Thin&Healthy® Inc.; TwinOaks Software; Ultra Fitness Equipment, Inc.; Visual Fitness Planner; and X-Force AB.

Not only do these great
 (See *Norm's Notes* Page 7)

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Established 1993

Established in 1993
17 Years and Counting!!!

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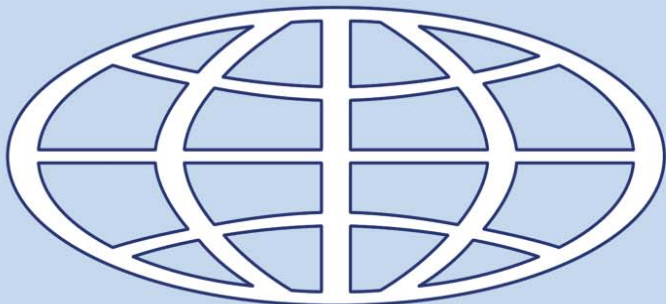
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...Norm Cates, Sr.

continued from page 3

Guinea. His squadron made many bombing runs against the Japanese in the Pacific. Cates had been given a 3-day R & R pass by his commander for work well done as a gunner and First Sergeant, and while he was away on R & R, the flight crew that he normally flew with was shot down while on a bombing mission and all perished. So, to say he was a lucky man would be very accurate. After World War II, he stayed in touch with his 5th Air Force, 13th Squadron buddies all of his life, and they gathered every two years for reunions.

Cates married Leota Clyde Beavers of Reader, Arkansas on April 9, 1939. It wasn't long before he had to go to war after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on the morning

of December 7, 1941. When he came back from World War II, they started a family and their first born was a son, Norman L. Cates, Jr., now a newspaper publisher in Atlanta, Georgia. The second son, Allen Gene Cates, is deceased and the youngest son, David Lee Cates, is a lawyer in Atlanta.

In 1948, the U.S. Air Force transferred Cates from Texarkana, Texas to Colorado Springs, Colorado, and he moved his family there. In 1949 their son, Allen Gene Cates, was born. A couple of years later, Cates was assigned as an Air Force recruiter back in Texarkana, and the family lived there for a couple of years before he was sent to the island of Okinawa, where he served for two years during the Korean War. His wife, Leota, and sons, Norm, Jr. and Allen Gene, joined him on Okinawa during his second year. The Kadina Air Force base

living quarters were rudimentary, at best, and the family lived in a Quonset Hut for one year and experienced the Japanese culture on the small, but beautiful Pacific island. They returned to the United States and to Texarkana in 1952 and Cates went back to his previous job as a recruiter. While living in Texarkana, he bought and began operating a Conoco gas station. After a couple of years, he was transferred to New Castle, Delaware where he retired from the U.S. Air Force as a Master Sergeant after twenty-one years of service to his country. While he was based in New Castle, his youngest son, David, was born.

In 1955, Cates was hired by Pratt & Whitney Aircraft Corporation, and they sent him to Hartford, Connecticut for training and then on to Newport News, Virginia for his first assignment as a jet engine tech rep on Navy

fighter planes. They lived in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Pratt and Whitney transferred him up and down the East coast until he retired in 1982 at age 65 in Jacksonville, Florida after 27 years with the company. Cates and his wife, Leota, made the last relocation of their lives to Springhill, Louisiana, her home town. After about 10 years of life in their retirement home of choice, Leota Cates suddenly passed away on June 27, 1991, ending their 53-year marriage.

On February 14, 1992, Cates married Louise Beavers. They were happily married until April 28, 2009, when she passed.

Norman L. Cates, Sr. was a great American and a great man who served his country for 48 years. He was an even better friend. He stayed in touch with his Air Force buddies all of his life after World War II, and he

was one of the last survivors of the 5th Air Force, 13th Squadron. His best friend, Al Demie, a truly great character, moved to Springhill in 2001 and lived in Cates' lake house for a couple of years. Having his old Air Force buddy nearby brought great joy to Cates. Norman Cates spent his last twenty-seven years enjoying the relaxing country life, working in his garden and backyard on the outskirts of Springhill, Louisiana. He loved it when his family would visit, and perhaps, his greatest joy was when they were with him to watch the birds, squirrels, rabbits and hummingbirds that would gather and feast on the food he would put out for them every day.

Norman L. Cates, Sr. was buried on April 10, 2010 next to his wife of 53 years, Leota Cates. He will be greatly missed by his family and all who knew him. May he Rest in Peace.



...Norm's Notes

continued from page 4

companies pay their IHRSA Associate Member dues, but they also paid for their exhibit space, the heavy cost of delivery for equipment and display materials, airfare, cab fare, hotel rooms and meals for their staff. These companies make IHRSA the world's leading health and fitness marketplace, and these exhibitors deserve to have a trade show WITHOUT COMPETITION from the conference seminar schedule! Until somebody with big purse strings raises bloody hell about it, IHRSA is going to keep doing it to its Associate Members! I'm hoping that IHRSA Management will grab hold of this issue and adjust next year's convention hours so that IHRSA Exhibitors,

especially the small ones, will have a whole lot more customers.

• **CLUB INSIDER Advertiser, Apex Fitness**, has added a great new feature to their bodybugg system, a mobile version of their website, which allows users to utilize the program while on the go. My son, Justin, has been a bodybugg user for almost two years now, so I asked him what this means for users:

"With the intensity of my daily schedule (work, grad school, planning a wedding, a new puppy, etc.), there are days where I do not have time to use the system to log my data. Adding my daily intake does take time, and it is fun to work with all the tools bodybugg offers, but being stuck to my computer whenever I want to do this can make it difficult.

With the mobile version, it is now easier. I don't recommend doing it while driving or anything, but there are times where I find myself sitting somewhere waiting for something with nothing to do for a few minutes. Enter bodybugg mobile. I can now do it on the go! I must still connect to my computer to load burn data, but this does not have to be done every day. This is the next step for an already great program, and I look forward to seeing what they come up with next."

If you haven't checked out bodybugg yet, you should because it can be quite a tool to help bring new members up to speed in your clubs, as well as retain them! They also have an excellent line of nutritional products. Check out the **Apex Fitness Ad on Page #28**.

• **DARON "Rocketman" ALLEN**, CEO of **Visual Fitness Planner**, has announced that VFP has a new website. I checked it out, and it's terrific! You can check it out too, at www.vfp.us OR www.visualfitnessplanner.com. Daron also told me that VFP is now in over **700 clubs worldwide!** Congratulations to **Daron Allen and Founder, MARIO BRAVOMALO** and the **VFP Team**, as they've grown the company very successfully over the past seven years, **increasing their total club count from 160 to over 700!** The latest VFP news is that they've added **dotFIT** to their list of **Strategic Partners**. **RAY GORDON**, **Founder of Sales Makers**, told me at **IHRSA 2010 in San Diego** that, if clubs don't have VFP in service by now, they are missing the boat for sure. VFP is not just a great tool for **Personal Training sales and member service**, but it has also evolved into a **fantastic tool for new membership sales**, making VFP a combination that's hard to beat. On top of that, VFP is very affordable. Check out the **Visual Fitness Planner Ad on Page #11 and Stay Tuned!**

• It's cool to see the **Green Valley**

Athletic and Tennis Club in Green Valley, Nevada (a suburb of Las Vegas) was featured in **Fitness Magazine as a Top 20 Club** and in **CBI Magazine's April Edition**. Thanks to **PAULA NEUBERT, President/General Manager of the Green Valley Athletic and Tennis Club**.

• **Club Industry East** is slated for **New York City, May 5-7th** at the **Javits Center**. **CLUB INSIDER Advertisers** who are exhibiting in NYC may be found in the directory below.

• **Congratulations to RANDY HEDRICK** and his **Fitness Anywhere Team** as they were named for the second year in a row to **Outside Magazine's (www.outsideonline.com)** third annual **"Best Places to Work"** list. **Fitness Anywhere** was ranked Number 11 out of 50 selected companies. The full list and related story was published in the May issue of **Outside** magazine, available at newsstands April 13, 2010.

• **SANDY COFFMAN**, our long-time and great friend, wrote on **Page #26** this month about our industry becoming more "inclusive" and cited the NuStep Machine as being a great tool to help attract the 50+ market, thus increasing club inclusiveness. I've had some experience with the NuStep Machine, having acquired one about six years ago and another two years later. My Dad, May He Rest In Peace, fell in love with the machine while visiting our family here in Atlanta. So, I acquired one for Dad and had it delivered to his home in Louisiana. Then, my Aunt Melba tried the machine while visiting my Dad and just fell in love with it. She had been managing diabetes by exercising on an old bike. So, Justin loaded my NuStep Machine onto his pickup truck, and I drove from Atlanta to Fort Worth, Texas and gave my machine to Aunt Melba. She was overjoyed and tells me she is on the NuStep Machine for at least one hour a day and

sometimes two hours. I thought I would comment on Sandy's article, featuring NuStep, with my own NuStep experience, because she is absolutely right.

• **Congratulations** to my long-time friend, **I(H)RSA Founding Member and former IHRSA Distinguished Service Award winner, TIM RICHARDS**, as his **Orchard Hills Athletic Club** has won yet another honor. This time, they won the **Wachusett Chamber of Commerce Business of the Year Award**. Check out the story on **Page #20**. Keep up the great work Tim!

• Well, **COLIN MILNER** just keeps on innovating at the **International Council on Active Aging (ICAA)** with the addition of the **ICAA Today TV Channel** at www.icaa.tv. Check out the list of featured guests on the network:

• **Dr. Dean Fixsen** on developing and implementing evidence-based programs
 • **Lawrence Biscontini** studies the mind through movement
 • **Kay Van Norman** on how ageism is impeding our potential
 • **Robert Thompson** examines the state of America's feet
 • **Jan Montague** talks about whole-person wellness
 • **Fred Hoffman** looks at managing multiple generations
 • **Maestro David Dworkin** talks about the power of music
 • **Dr. Andrew Carle** explores Nana technology.

To share your video and knowledge, please visit <http://www.icaa.tv/icaareporter/become-an-ICAA-reporter.htm>. To view ICAA-TV, visit www.icaa.tv.

• **WALLY BOYKO's National Fitness Trade Journal Conference and Trade Show** is scheduled to be held in **Reno, Nevada, August 19, 20 and 21**. **MIKE BALFOUR** will be honored with the **NFTJ Lifetime Achievement Award**. In case you don't know who Mike Balfour is, he's the **Founder and Former CEO of Fitness First** in England, now the world's largest health club chain. Also to be honored in Reno with the **NFTJ Distinguished Service Awards** are: **JOHN AGLIALORO, CEO of Cybex; CHUCK FEDORKA; KEVIN STEELE, Ph.D;** and **MIKE ZINDA**.

(See Norm's Notes Page 22)

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...Prairie Life

continued from page 3

for each other's strengths and weaknesses. In time, those strengths and weaknesses are maximized and minimized respectively to build something great. Speaking with Dean and Jennifer, this came across to me. From Prairie Life's humble beginnings as a single, 12-court racquetball club, started in the 1970's by Dean and brother-in-law, Bob Kerrey (Former Nebraska Governor and Senator), to a multi-location chain of full-service facilities today, Prairie Life has run the gamut. Through this story, I hope to portray that transformation, the lessons learned and the bright future that lies ahead, not only for Prairie Life, but for the entire health and fitness industry.



Dean Rasmussen

An Interview With Dean Rasmussen, Founder & CEO

CLUB INSIDER (C.I.) - When and how did you start your career in the health and fitness industry?

Dean Rasmussen (DR) - My brother-in-law, Bob Kerrey, and I first started in business together. We opened a restaurant together

in 1973. That was in Omaha, NE. Bob moved to Lincoln from Omaha, and we opened our second restaurant on a site that had potential for additional development beyond just a restaurant. We both had been very interested in health and fitness. In fact, we were avid handball players. We also had some exposure at the University of Nebraska with the development of a strength training program when we were going to school there. That was started by Bob Devaney, the infamous football coach for the University of Nebraska.

So, we had a keen amount of interest there, and it continued to grow. As part of the handball conversion to racquetball, we thought it would be fun to take advantage of that new fad, so to speak. We built our first 12-court racquetball club, which we called 'Wall Bangers,' and opened it in 1977. It took off and was a lot of fun and successful. We operated it over the next few years, but at the same time, we kept developing what we thought might be the next step with regards to what people would be looking for in the health and fitness industry. That is where the whole concept evolved with regards to our multi-purpose facility and the development and building of the first one in 1985, in Lincoln as well.

C.I. - When and where did your first Prairie Life Fitness expansion occur?

DR - Our first expansion was in 1987 when we went back to our Wall Bangers Racquet Club, which we originally started with, and did a major conversion of it into a full service facility. The popularity of racquetball was beginning to fade a little bit then, so part of the development was reducing the number of courts

that we had available and putting a substantial addition onto the building so that we could provide a full-service facility with a pool, running track and strength training and group exercise areas.

C.I. - Is Bob Kerrey still involved with Prairie Life?

DR - Bob is still a majority partner with me in the business, and that is the extent of his involvement. He decided to get into politics in 1980 and ran for Governor of Nebraska. He was successful there and went on to serve two terms in the United States Senate, so his time has been totally consumed with his responsibilities from a political standpoint. He has been a great partner.

C.I. - Please tell our readers about Prairie Life today. What is your typical club like?

DR - We completed that first development in 1987, and then, we built our first full-service Prairie Life in Omaha in 1990. Beyond that, we opened additional clubs in 1990, 1995, 2001, 2002, 2005, 2007 and the most recent being this last November (2009) with the Mutual of Omaha Midtown Club. We are small and privately owned, so we have tried to be very careful with our growth, and at the same time, tried to have a lot of fun with it. It is a fun industry, so we have enjoyed every minute of the growth and development of it. In fact, it's interesting, Jennifer helped us develop a slogan, 'Prairie Life is a smart balance of fitness and fun.' That's really what we are all about and have always been about; Jennifer has just been able to put it into a few words that make sense.

Our typical club is approximately 60,000 square feet, and it includes a large cardiovascular and strength training area, a regulation basketball court, racquetball courts, Yoga and Pilates studios, a running track, a 25-yard, 6-lane indoor pool, an outdoor pool with a large sundeck, a children's gymnasium and locker rooms with steam, sauna and whirlpool. We also have a small food and beverage service area as well.

C.I. - Can you tell us about your Jump Start Program?

DR - We developed the Jump Start Program about two years ago, and it is focused primarily on trying to get our new members started out --not only started out, but hopefully, started out right. I think a lot of people that come in



Prairie Life Lobby

and join our clubs are people who have not been a member of a club. They are very intimidated about the facility and all the things that are included in the facility. Quite frankly, they are a little bit embarrassed because they are either a little bit overweight or a lot overweight. So, what we are trying to do from the very beginning, upon completion of agreeing on a sales contract, is to get them connected with one of our personal trainers for a no-cost opportunity --not a sales session-- to be able to share with them what they can do and what they can really enjoy and have fun with as part of their membership at Prairie Life Fitness Centers.

The true value of retention starts Day 1. If you start that first day, your odds for retention are much better. The attrition in our industry is huge, and it's a challenge. So, hopefully, we are addressing very specifically the retention issue with our Jump Start Program.

C.I. - Given Prairie Life's expansion, what are some of the challenges you have experienced operating multiple locations across several states, as opposed to one, local area club?

DR - It's not really a challenge, but an exciting matter to deal with, in that we are a small, family-owned business, is going to the different states and having to learn about the need for complying with different rules and regulations. Then we are very careful about site selection, taking a look at the demographics, and obviously, the cost of the land is very important because we own our own facilities. The third part is then taking a careful look at competition. To go into a market and build a club right next to or close by an existing

facility doesn't make sense at all, especially if you look at the demographics and it doesn't allow for more than one club in that area. You never really know, though, so you do the best you can, try to stay focused, and hopefully, it works for the best.

C.I. - Your newest club, Midtown Crossing in Omaha opened in 2009. Do you have additional locations in the works?

DR - It's really been an exciting development for us. We were asked by Mutual of Omaha to be part of a \$300 million development they were building on their campus, and construction-wise, I'd say it is about 80-90% completed at this point in time. It's big, and they asked us to be one of the anchors of the development. We were pleased to be able to be part of that. But once again, it's been an exciting development for us because it's quite a bit different than what we have done in the past. Our other clubs are family-oriented with all the kid's programs, and this club is much more urban and adult-oriented.

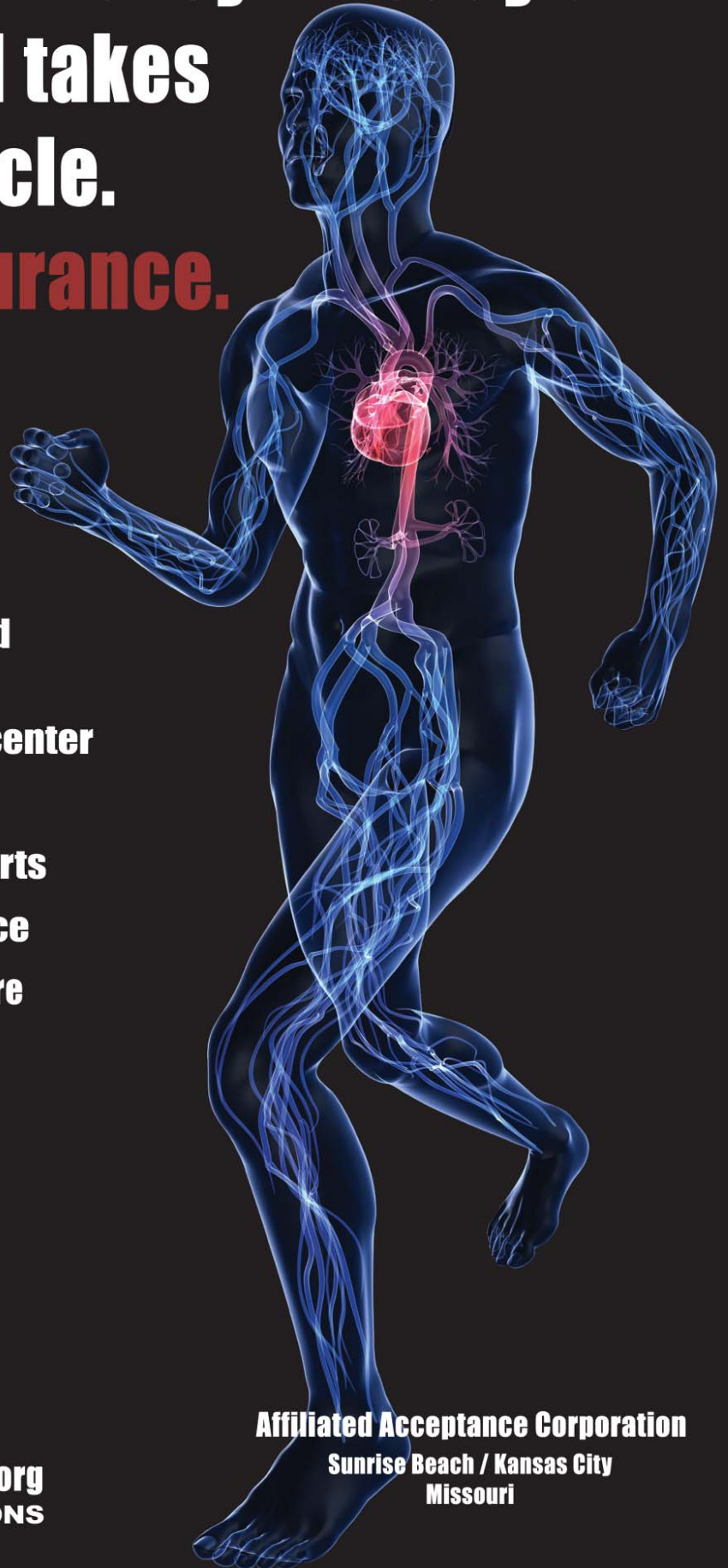
We have had our hands full with getting this one up and running. Obviously, it takes some time, effort and cost to ramp up membership. That part of it is going very well for us, and we are ahead of expectations and projections. We are excited about that. But, at the same time, our focus is 100% on, not only growing the newest one, but also making every effort we can with all of our existing facilities to generate new sales and retain as many of the existing members as we can by making them happy.

C.I. - Expanding on the previous question, where do you see Prairie Life in the future, five or so years (See *Prairie Life* Page 10)



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...Prairie Life

continued from page 8

from now?

DR - We are going to continue to look for new locations and opportunities, whether they are something similar to midtown or our other clubs. The industry is changing, as you well know, and the biggest change in our industry, along with dealing with the recession, is the tremendous amount of new competition that has developed in our industry, everything from the very small, store-front fitness centers to the big mega fitness centers. The market is very crowded right now, so we are trying to be as careful as we can with regards to what's next.

C.I. - What role did IHRSA have in your company's development?

DR - I've been a member of IHRSA right from the beginning and have attended the tradeshow and taken advantage of the educational opportunities. Each year, we take several, if not all, of our managers to further their education in a given area. I go to those as well because I think there is always something out there for me to learn as well. If we come back from any of the educational opportunities with just one new idea, it's worth the expense.

C.I. - Given the health care debate, as well as the current physical condition of a majority of the United States population, not to mention our industry's low penetration rate, where do health and fitness clubs, like Prairie Life, fit into the mix?

DR - There has obviously been a lot of attention drawn to it with regards to the importance of health care, regardless of which side you are on, and it seems like

there have been occasional, very small interjections into that whole discussion about the importance of exercise. What we are trying to do within our clubs, specifically, is to do everything we can to start, at the earliest age possible, promoting some form of activity and making it fun. Maybe it is a swim lesson, starting with a six-month old, where dad comes in or mom comes in, and they start a swim program and have fun doing it. That evolves into possibly another level up of swim ability, or they start with one of our Tiny Tots Gymnastics Programs or one of the Dance Programs. I think starting with that early age group is a much better strategy than saying, 'Let's start with this guy who's 60 years old.' There's a certain amount of people in that age group that aren't interested in being retrained.

C.I. - We're all experiencing the Great Recession. What have you done differently during the past two years to keep Prairie Life successfully in the game?

DR - The biggest thing we are trying to do is not only focus on the lifeblood of our business, which is new sales, but to focus on retention and doing anything and everything we can to keep our facilities up to snuff, to be sure that every member who comes in the door feels like he is being welcomed like a guest in our own home and to keep current with regards to new items and change. My guess is that you've experienced the new Zumba craze. I've observed our classes, and they're huge. They're just absolutely enormous. It's fun exercise, like I talked about before, in terms of what we are trying to do with the smart balance of fitness and fun. It's a balance of physical activity, and it's a

fun way to do it. TRX Strength Training has been a big thing for us, in terms of people wanting to try something new and different in strength training. So, trying to keep current with regards to the new things that are developing, I think, helps with the retention of members. But, certainly number one of importance is making people feel welcome and taking good care of our facilities so they can be proud of them every time they come in.

Additionally, ancillary sales is critical because we are really at a juncture now in our industry where raising monthly dues is not an option. In the past, if we needed to take a dollar or two dollars a month increase on dues, it wasn't a problem, and it created a lot of additional revenue to offset some of the tremendous ongoing increases we were experiencing in cost of operations. Today, the increased revenue per member is almost 100% towards ancillary sales as opposed to an increase in membership dues.

C.I. - With everything you have accomplished in our industry, what are you most proud of?

DR - I think I am most proud of the fact that we have developed businesses that have been successful, and people, when they come in and use them, get something out of and enjoy them. That's certainly from the standpoint of providing a service to people, and that is something I am enormously proud of. On the business side of it, I am enormously proud of my management group. I have been very fortunate to put together a management team in our facilities, as well as at our executive level, that do a tremendous job, and many of them have been with me for in excess of fifteen years. So, there is a lot of longevity there, which I hope indicates they are having fun and enjoying their work on a daily basis.

An Interview With Jeff Young, Director of Operations

CLUB INSIDER (C.I.) - When did you join Prairie Life, and what position(s) did you hold prior to your current post?

Jeff Young (JY) - I joined Prairie Life Fitness in 1992 as the Membership Sales Manager for one of our clubs in Lincoln, NE. Since then, I've served as Club Manager at three of our facilities, and in 2002, I assumed the role of Director of Operations.



Prairie Life Basketball Court

C.I. - What are some of the challenges you have experienced operating multiple locations across several states?

JY - The biggest challenge with multiple locations is establishing and maintaining consistency and continuity across all of the clubs. We want our members to have the same positive experience whether they visit our club in Nashville, TN or one in Omaha, NE.

C.I. - How has the economy affected Prairie Life, and what adjustments have you made system-wide to combat those potential woes?

JY - The economy has certainly made things more challenging, but it hasn't changed what is paramount to the success of our clubs. The two critical areas for success remain member retention and cost control.

We continue to evaluate and improve our new member integration program called Jump Start. Members need to see value in excess of the cost of their membership, so it's more important than ever that we get them started right and keep them using the clubs regularly.

Payroll is the single largest expense category in



Jennifer Mahlendorf

An Interview With Jennifer Mahlendorf, Director of Sales & Marketing

CLUB INSIDER (C.I.) - When did you join Prairie Life?

Jennifer Mahlendorf (JM) - I joined Prairie Life in my current capacity in 2004.

C.I. - The Prairie Life slogan is, "Fitness for the Entire Family." What does this mean to your members, and what success has it brought Prairie Life?

JM - Prairie Life has always been about incorporating fitness and fun for the entire family. This is important for two reasons. First, we want to provide an environment the whole family can enjoy. Families are busy, and
(See Prairie Life Page 12)



Prairie Life Indoor Pool



Jeff Young



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What are the top initiatives that you are focusing on?

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- Increasing foot traffic to your club through innovative marketing?
- Increasing the overall closing ratio at the point of sale?
- Increasing personal training revenues?
- Implementing a system that drives consistency?
- Increasing membership retention by insuring that no member falls through the cracks?
- Increasing your exposure at community outreach events?
- Increasing your corporate presence in the community?
- But more importantly, maximizing your revenue per member?

“Since we’ve begun using the VFP in June 2009, our Personal Trainers have increased their production dramatically. I’m sure that you would agree that one of the challenges with multiple locations and personnel is “keeping them on the same sheet of music”. With the VFP, everyone is sending the same message in the same manner to all of our members. Naturally this promotes better continuity and higher sales. The bottom-line is that our Personal Training sales have increased approximately 300 - 400%.”

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Harley Mork, Director of Personal Training

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...Prairie Life

continued from page 10

by providing an atmosphere the whole family can have fun in, it makes it easier for mom and dad to get a workout. This is also important so families can build excellent health and fitness habits together. Second, we provide a good social environment for the entire family. We want and believe people can have fun while exercising! By providing social events (Easter Egg Hunts, Swim Parties, Wine and Cheese, Parents Night Out, Halloween Party, etc.),

the whole family can have fun.

C.I. - What is the greatest challenge you face in marketing, and what is your solution?

JM - The greatest challenge in marketing the past couple of years has been the economy. We are constantly trying to do more with less, so coming up with more innovative ways to utilize free marketing or to maximize our dollar has been top of mind.

C.I. - Obviously, your group has a strong relationship with the communities you serve. What are

some of the community service efforts that Prairie Life utilizes to build trust in the communities you serve?

JM - Prairie Life has strong relationships in all of our communities and being actively engaged is vital to any business who wants to sustain. We encourage our employees to get involved in various non-profit activities, and our members are encouraged to ask us for their support. We encourage all of our clubs to become involved in their local community, and many times, that charity or organization is a "personal favorite" of one of our members, or perhaps, an employee.

One major event that Prairie Life and Dean Rasmussen have been involved in is a golf outing to benefit a charity in Omaha called Project Harmony. Since the Prairie Life Fitness Golf Invitational inception in 1996 (originally under a different name but with the leadership of Dean Rasmussen), the invitational has raised over \$1.7 million for Project Harmony.

I'm proud to say the amount of community events is too many to mention throughout our markets, but here is a limited sampling:



Prairie Life Food and Beverage Service Area

- American Red Cross
- Adopt a Family
- National Seniors Health Day
- Highway Patrol or Local Safety Councils (Hold a children's car seat check for the community)
- Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America
- Susan G. Komen Run
- Racquet for a Cure

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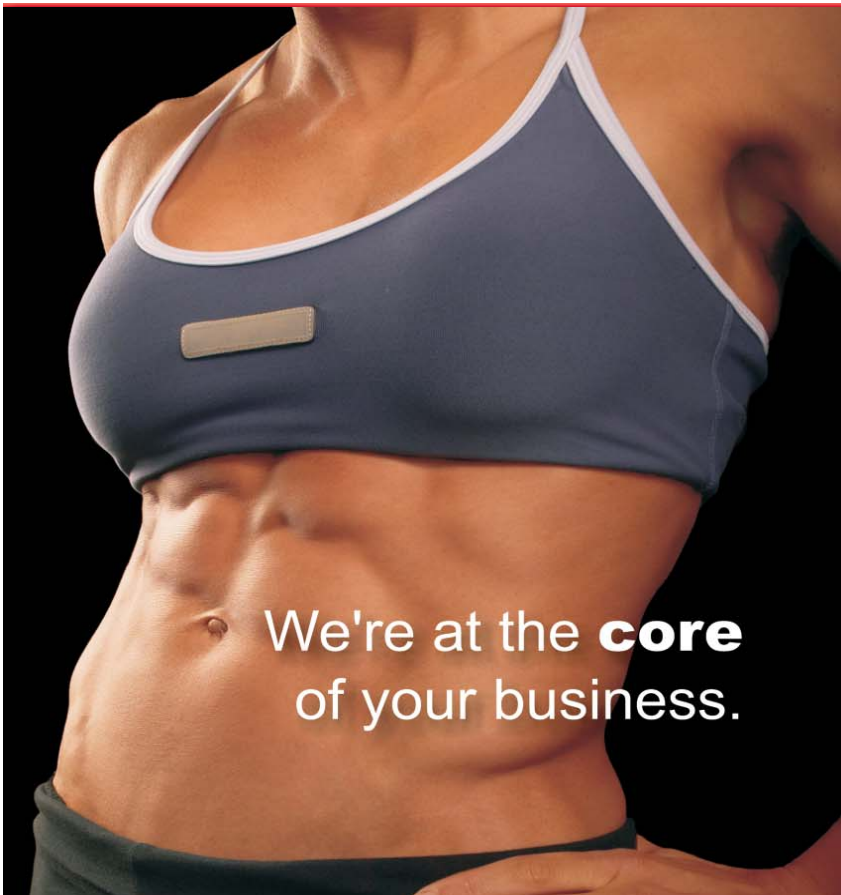
I want to thank Dean, Jeff and Jennifer for their contributions to this story. Additionally, I want

to especially thank Jennifer for her help and additional support throughout the process.

(Justin Cates is the President of CLUB INSIDER. From the age of eight, he spent his non-school and sports hours in a home which doubled as CLUB INSIDER Headquarters. He has lived and breathed this industry for 25 years, since his own day one. Now, he is an integral part of the "Story" of Norm Cates and CLUB INSIDER. Justin may be reached at Justin@clubinsideronline.com or by phone at 770-595-6086)



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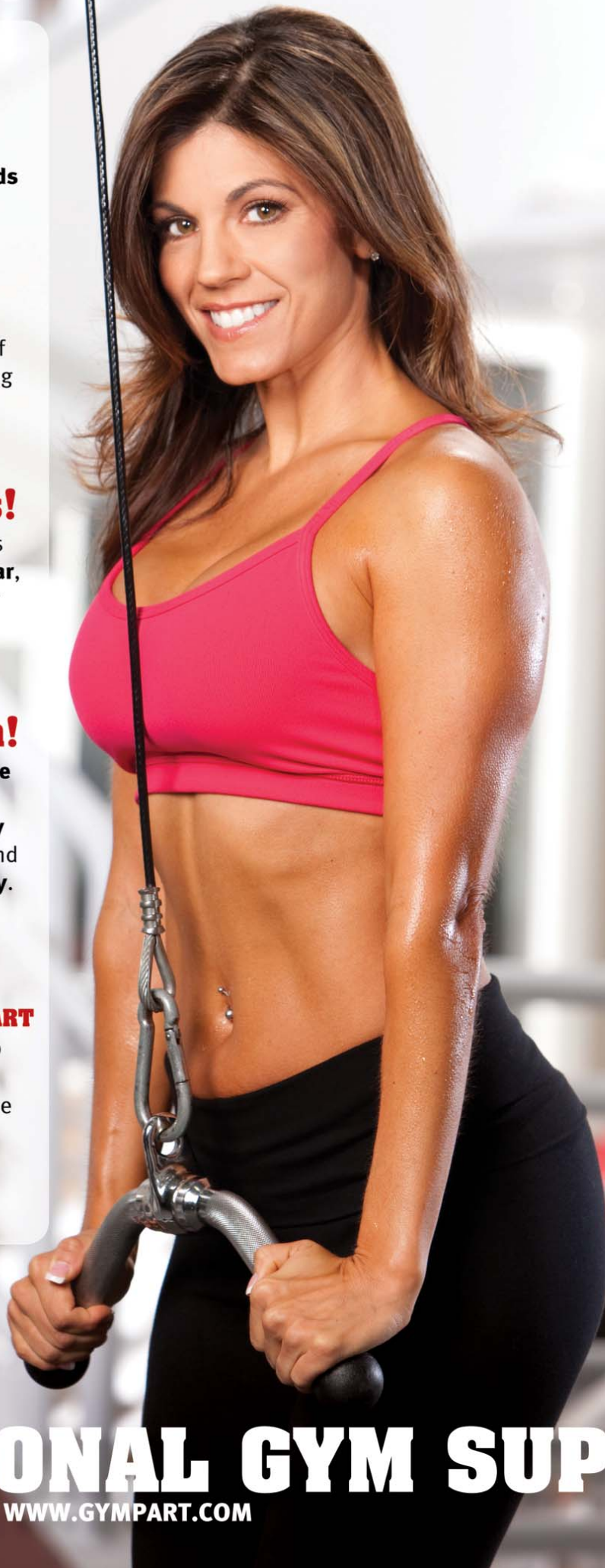
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The Right Team

Step Eight in the Series: Fifteen Steps to Paradise

By: Will Phillips

What is a Manager? Your management team is the group that helps you *manage*. It could be one or a dozen others. To be a manager, a person must have regularly demonstrated his competence and confidence in making a variety of decisions about his area, responded to unusual events and planned for the future. It also means you trust him enough to be away from your club for a week, if not a month. Otherwise, you really have employees who are called managers.

Business Reasons for a Management Team

There are two business reasons for having a management team. You are not good enough at everything that needs doing. You may excel at sales and be weak at people management. Or, you are great with people and weak at the numbers. The way a business addresses this is not to train the band leader to play all the instruments but to get all the instrument players in the band.

The second reason for a management team is that there is too much to do in any business of any size. In the beginning, the founder is expected to work 100 hours a week, and the founder's

passion is sufficient for this huge commitment... for a while, but not for ten years. The CEO can become lost in operations and then overwhelmed when competition arrives, leaving no time for leading (i.e. exploring and planning the next moves wisely). It also helps to have a family and a healthy life style by only working 40 or even 60 hours a week, and this requires a team.

REX Roundtable members clearly demonstrate that every successful club has a good management team. Without the team, the club(s) would be smaller, weaker and less profitable.

Of course, if your business model, sales or marketing is off base or weak, you will not grow enough to afford to hire managers and will be locked in an e-myth spiral of frustration where you are overworked and underpaid and frustrated while the business is just surviving.

Building a Powerful Management Team

Developing a management team that can truly contribute to your club's growth and success is relatively straight forward. I have seen many of our REX Roundtable members do so. It is simply a matter of regularly addressing the elements outlined here. The first is hiring right.

This will be covered in Part 15 of this series, but here is a quick summary of what is needed:

- A clear definition of who you want especially in terms of attitudes and capacities, as degrees and experience count for less.
- Multiple interviews.
- Paper and pencil testing for management style and temperament.
- Practical assessments in real situations.
- A superb orientation and fast and blameless feedback once hired.
- Finally, you must reassign those managers who are below standard, as leaving them in place reduces every manager's effectiveness.

There are three critical attitudes or values needed in a top team player:

1. A strong drive to achieve and win; common among all athletes.
2. A willingness to sacrifice personal goals and ego when it helps the team win; rare among most athletes. Developing this area is what most of the good coaches focus on at the college or professional level.
3. Sufficient sense of self and courage to be open to learning new ways of seeing things. This sounds easy, but fundamentally, we arrive at the management table with our biases, our ideas and our philosophy of management. When they are challenged, we defend, and the learning stops. Another way to say this is that the very best managers are willing to engage in conflict; not in a nasty blaming way, but rather, in a way that truly puts their ideas and behavior up for public examination and review by the management team. Recently, Patrick Lencioni presented a beautiful rationale explaining how this lack of conflict inevitably leads to poor results for the organization. His assessment on the Five Dysfunctions of a Management Team is a required developmental activity for the highest performing teams. This process puts into place specific tools and actions Jim Collins lays out for a high performing *Good*

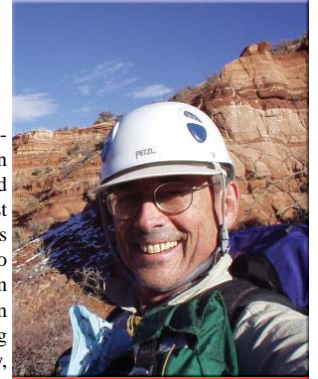
To Great management team.

Team Power Equals Strength Over Time

For a strong management team to really have an impact, they have to be around for a while. In the very best clubs in REX Roundtables, this means an average tenure of ten to fifteen years. Keeping your team requires that you take care of them with a growing income, strong benefits, and most importantly, new challenges in their work. Ultimately, for a team member to increase his income, he must add significantly more value every year. Your challenge as the CEO is to help him see how to do this and then challenge him and get out of his way (i.e. delegate). Too often, long standing management team members are not growing and developing as managers and contributors. They are stagnant placeholders depending on your goodwill. When this happens, other managers may leave to move to a growth opportunity. To grow your managers, you must learn how to hold people accountable in a principled and effective way. REX believes this skill is so critical that it is focusing its Roundtable curriculum on this topic for the next 12-18 months.

Resources:

Developing Sacrifice For The Team's Success: *Sacred*



Will Phillips

Hoops by Phil Jackson; *Red Auerbach On Management* by Red Auerbach, Harvard Business Review, March 1987

Tools For Developing Constructive Conflict: *Good To Great* by Jim Collins; *Five Dysfunctions of a Team* by Patrick Lencioni

Holding People Accountable: *HOW Did That Happen: Holding People Accountable* by Roger Connors and Tom Smith

(Will Phillips is the President of REX Roundtables for Executives. REX chairs eighteen club owner Roundtables in the U.S., Australia, New Zealand and Brazil. The newest REX Roundtable will focus on Small Giant businesses in all industries. Your comments and inquiries are welcome at Will@RexRoundtables.com)

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More has changed in the fitness industry during the last several years than during the last 30 years. Maturing markets (defined as more clubs crowding into already crowded competitive rings), the flat economy, the advent of the low-priced value club, and a much more sophisticated consumer have all combined to force the fitness business owner to change now or fail and leave the room for owners who are willing to grasp the new reality.

Since the advent of modern fitness industry in the mid part of the last century, we have practiced a culture of failure in the club market. The new member coming into a typical club simply never had a chance to succeed and meet his fitness goals unless he was one of the chosen few who could afford, and was willing to pay for, leadership and coaching. All the rest have been given antiquated circuit workouts, told to walk endlessly on a treadmill, or, worse, just ignored and left to fail on their own, eventually leaving the club in frustration.

But the member's failure hasn't been a factor in anyone's business plan. Every system we have designed in the clubs during the last 30 years and more has been built for the acquisition of new members, with little emphasis on keeping the members we have already purchased. Every member was replaceable and there has been little need to keep what is already ours because there were always more members coming through the door to replace the failures.

Now the market is radically different. We are entering the age of retention in the industry, where the most important thing we can do as operators and managers is to learn how to keep the business that is costly and difficult to acquire.

The foundation of retention is customer service, which as an industry we don't understand and don't know how to reach, and we have never hired the right staff to implement a good service program. After over 60 years of history, we are now back at the beginning. This new era will be defined by our ability to build a culture of success where every member has a chance to succeed and is appreciated and valued for his contribution to our business. Your first step toward achieving a financially successful club in today's market is customer service and that step begins with this book.



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Launch A Summer Referral Promotion Now!

By: Chris Russo

Create some buzz in your club this summer!

The summer tends to be a little slower for many clubs, but it doesn't have to be. It is a great opportunity to combine a couple months of your marketing budget, have some fun and get a ton of fresh leads and new members.

Referral promotions are nothing new to our industry, but unfortunately, too many clubs don't put enough time and effort into getting the message out to members and creating some excitement about their promotion. A bike hanging from the ceiling or a grill against the wall surrounded by a few posters just isn't going to cut it any more. You need to market your promotion and get your members talking and wanting to be part of it.

First of all, there is a prevailing mentality amongst many members that "I never win anything, so I'm not going to bother." Here are a few ways to introduce a multi-dimensional approach to your summer referral and get some buzz happening:

Extend the Time

Often, a promotion runs for one month with a

mediocre prize and limited marketing. It starts off strong but fades fast. By making it last for six or eight weeks, you can double up your marketing budget and use the extra time to continue building momentum.

The Promotion

We used items such as B.B.Q. grills, bikes, Vespas and more. You can pick whatever you like, depending on your budget, market and demographics, but here is a scenario using a grill as the prize:

Work with a local retailer to make a deal for the grill and include their logo and store info on all your marketing. They are usually willing to cut you a great deal if you offer something in return, like a few thousand impressions to your membership base! Once you have the grill, you can plan on how to dress up the display area. For those of you with multiple clubs, here is an opportunity to create a little friendly competition between your staff at each location.

One of the simplest ways to have members overcome their objections is to make it as easy as possible for them to enter, while rewarding them for their effort.

Enter the t-shirt as the motivation for referrals! It's amazing how people, regardless of income, will do just about anything for a free t-shirt. And not just any shirt, this one needs to be designed specifically for this promotion. You also need to have referral cards printed with room for members to put their information as well as the name, phone and email address of five friends. Once completed, the shirt is theirs.

This is the point where the fun and buzz begins. Encourage everyone to wear their new shirt when they come to work out because there will be random prizes given out every day throughout the promotion to those who do, nothing too big. I suggest internal things like smoothies, juice, bars, PT sessions, coupons or small inexpensive items relating to the grand prize. Then, weekly throughout the promotion, offer slightly larger prizes, drawing from the names of members who have made referrals, items like supermarket gift cards, BBQ utensils, aprons, etc.

The goal is to have as many people as possible wearing the shirts around the club in order to get other members asking how they can get one too. This creates a domino effect, which means

increased referrals while member excitement levels build at the club.

To get your referral promotion message out, you can choose from a variety of options, but try to mix them up as much as you can based on what you can afford. The goal is to minimize your expenses while putting the majority of your budget into the shirts and prizes. Our recommendation would be to plaster the club with posters; large ones (24 x 36 inches) in high traffic areas and smaller ones (11x17 inches) throughout the club, i.e. bathroom stall doors, pillars, counters, doorways and bulletin boards. Whatever number you think you need, double it, as you can't have too many.

Send an email, using graphics that match your campaign materials, to all your members announcing when the promotion starts and telling them what they need to do to be involved and win. You should follow this up with other emails listing how many members have gotten involved, when there are only a certain amount of shirts left, what each week's prize is going to be while mentioning who won the previous week's prize. Facebook is also a brilliant tool for sharing this type of information. If you are going to



Chris Russo

use Facebook, you need to have posts at least three times a week, if not more.

If you don't have a good database of member email addresses, or depending on the number of members, then you should look at a direct mail piece in order to get the message to them in a cost effective format.

Cap It Off With A "Welcome Summer 2010 Party!"

It's always a great idea to cap off your Summer Referral Promotion with a "Welcome Summer" Member Appreciation Party right when summer begins on June 21st. It would also be (See *Chris Russo Page 18*)

Apex Fitness Introduces bodybugg® mobile!

Apex Fitness has announced the release of bodybugg® mobile, the mobile-enabled site for bodybugg on the iPhone and iPod Touch. Users now have the ability to log meals, view and edit past meals and view calorie burn data.

This is something that bodybugg users have been asking for, and it is now a reality. Users

no longer need to be in front of the computer to access their bodybugg program. With the new mobile-enabled site, users are able to:

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- View calorie burn target
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- View calorie balance



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-Rita P.**

**"I'm paying \$300/mo for weight loss in addition to my \$35/mo fitness membership."
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...Chris Russo

continued from page 16

the perfect time and place for the premium drawings. This generates energy during six weeks to two months of your promotion, and importantly, the party should generate a last push for new member referrals going into the summer. All members, and newly joined referral members who joined during the Summer Referral Promotion should be invited to the party. The B.B.Q. grill giveaway, or perhaps a Grand Prize Drawing for a hammock, can help generate more attendance and more referrals right up until the party deadline. The club energy will truly buzz if promoted well.

The point is to make it FUN for everybody by having a focal point "Welcome Summer 2010 Party" kickoff to end your spring member referral promotion. That event will also help keep your club in the minds of your members during the summer, too. And, remember... promote... promote... promote! Have little badges with the party name for each staff member saying something like: Don't miss our "Welcome to Summer 2010 Party" on June 21st and be sure that all staff wears them at all times. Also, remember that regularly scheduled P.A. announcements in the club as well as announcements by group exercise instructors and Personal Trainers will help boost attendance. This in-house promotional effort will enhance your other marketing efforts for the promotion.

The best part of a club referral promotion like this is the interaction it creates between members and staff and among your members. With a little early planning and strategy, it will be simple to manage how and when you communicate your message and ensure you keep the momentum strong during the life of the promotion.

Now, go have some fun, fire up your staff and members, generate a bunch of new leads and make it a profitable summer!

(Chris Russo is General Manager of Susan K. Bailey Advertising, an agency with over 25 years of experience in the fitness industry. Visit them at www.clubads.com or call 888-349-4594 and speak with one of their Marketing Coaches)

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Orchard Hills Athletic Club Receives 2010 Business of the Year Award

Orchard Hills Athletic Club, located in Lancaster, MA, is the 2010 recipient of the Wachusett Chamber of Commerce Business of the Year Award. The award is for Chamber members that have demonstrated leadership, innovation and a strong image within the business community. Over 300 businesses were considered.

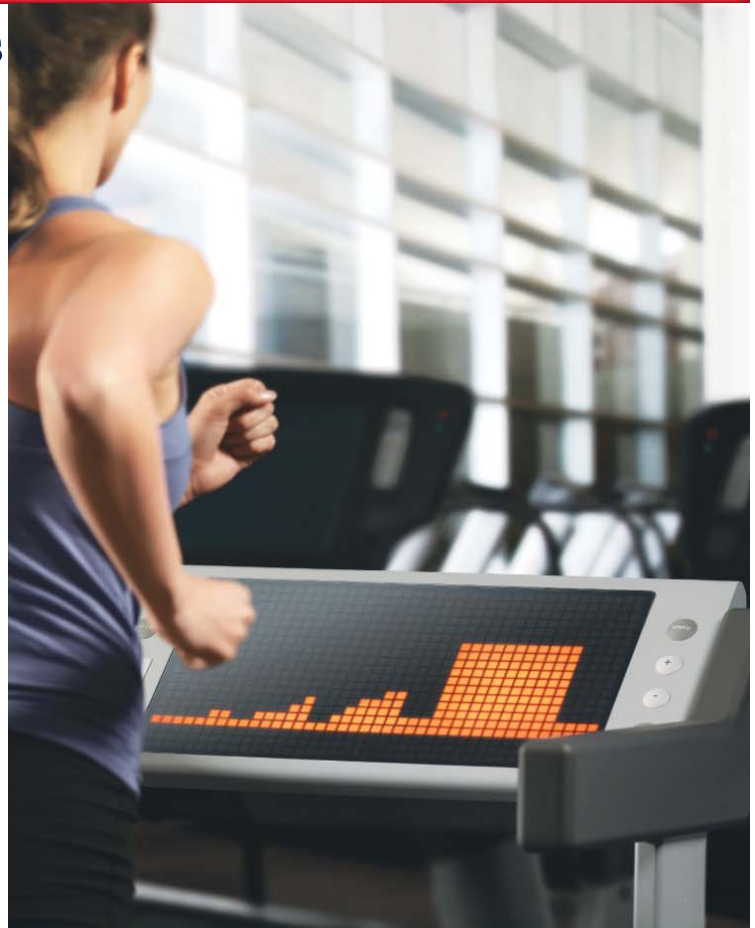
Founder and Owner, Tim Richards, of Lunenburg, MA said, "The Award honors the hard work of our many long-term employees, and also our many business partners which include the Health Alliance Hospital System. This award reinforces, we believe, the importance of health and fitness in our communities. We are blessed to be in the business of helping children and adults of all ages... and shapes... to live healthier lives."

CLUB INSIDER congratulates our



Tim Richards

friend, Tim Richards, as he continues to add to his pile of awards for excellence in his club and his community service efforts. Operators like Tim are rare.



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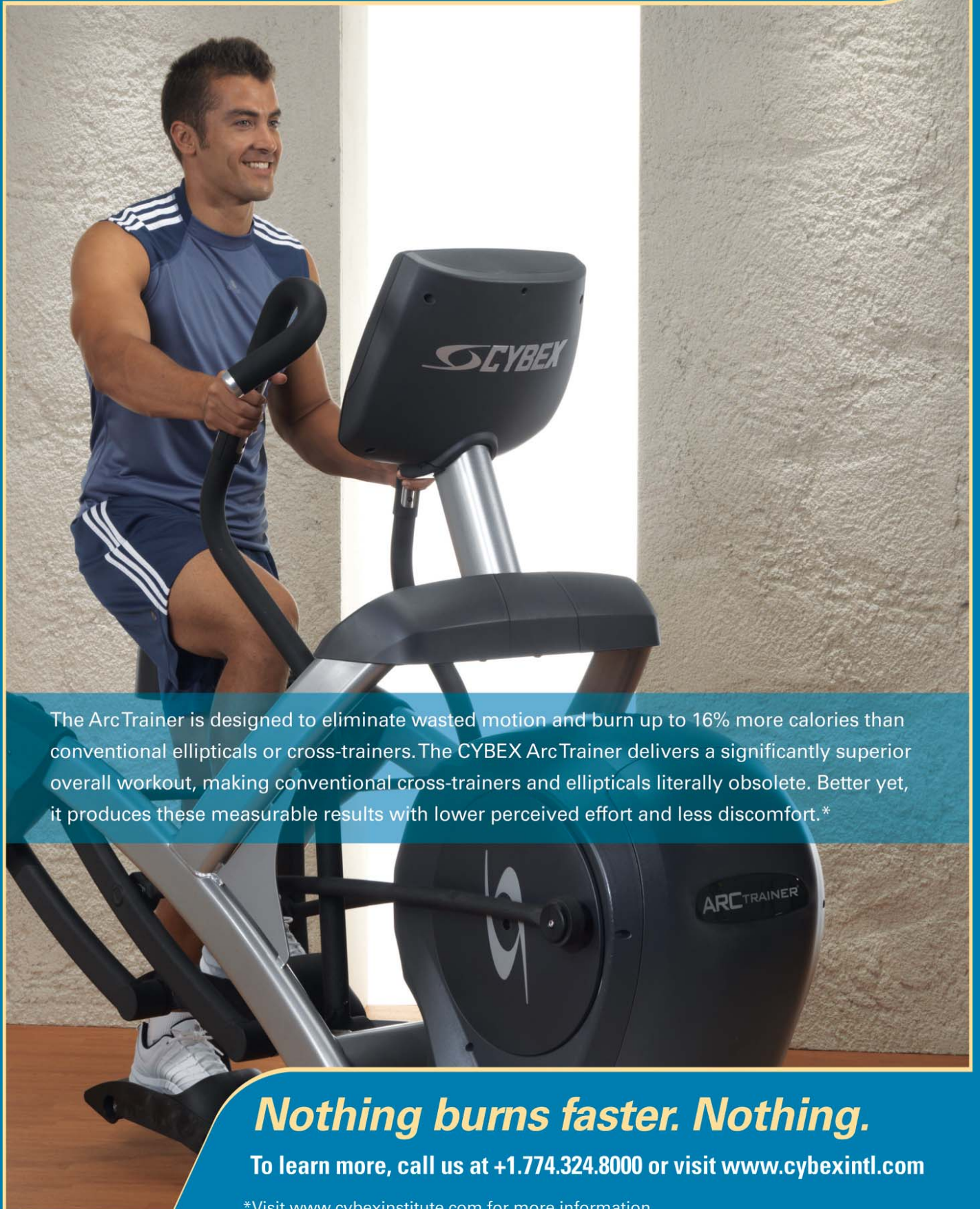
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...Norm's Notes

continued from page 7

•The name **JOHN E. STRANSKY** is a name that will live in infamy because he was the **President of Life Fitness** that pulled the company out of **IHRSA's 2010 Trade Show!** Word is **IHRSA President, JOE MOORE**, and a host of **IHRSA Board Members**, including **Board Chairman, DAVID "DR. FEELGOOD" PATCHEL-EVANS**, stepped in and wrote letters, and Life Fitness ended up back in the **2010 Trade Show**, with their exhibit right at the front door to the show I might add. However, not to be named **IHRSA** elders believe that much more aggressive and proactive measures were needed in this instance, moves such as Moore, Patchel-Evans and several Board Members immediately being on jet planes to Chicago to address this issue in person with Stransky and the Life Fitness people. Thankfully, reaching out made it all turn out okay for **IHRSA** as Life Fitness was brought back into the Trade Show. Now, Stransky is history at Life Fitness as the **Brunswick Corporation**, in an **April 13th Investor Relations News Release**, announced that Stransky had "resigned effective immediately." **PETER B. HAMILTON**, **Brunswick COO**, will step in as **President** on an interim basis. Hamilton was President in 2005

and 2006. **DUSTIN E. MCCOY**, **Chairman and CEO** of the Brunswick Corporation said, "Until a permanent successor is named, Peter will be responsible for the Life Fitness business in addition to his responsibilities as Chief Financial Officer. He will lead a team of very capable managers who have many years of experience in the fitness industry." McCoy added that Brunswick will be considering a number of both internal and external candidates to lead Life Fitness.

•**GORDON JOHNSON**, owner of three **Gold's Gyms** in **Douglasville** and **Marietta, Georgia**, converted his oldest gym in Douglasville to a low-price model about a year ago. I was driving down I-20 one day, on the way to Louisiana, when I spotted Gordon's large billboard advertising his low rates. So, later on, I called him and asked about his conversion to the low-price model. He told me he was trying it to see what it would do and asked me to hold the story for a later date so he would have some experience with the idea, which I did. A few months ago, he told me he had "moderate success" with the conversion. Fast forward to a couple of weeks ago... **GGFA (Gold's Gym Franchise Association)** hosted a **GGFA Regional Roundtable** at **BTS Headquarters** in **Marietta, Georgia**. They brought in two top-gun industry gurus

to present solutions for **Gold's** operators to compete with the low-price model, such as **MIKE GRONDAHL's Planet Fitness** or **PACKY WILSON's Fitness 19 Fitness Centers** and all other clubs, regardless of size.

Frankly, I think my friend Gordon Johnson's move to the low-price model was a gutsy one, and I hope it works out well for him over the long haul. Gordon is an extraordinarily excellent club owner/operator, and that is why he has experienced moderate success with his move to the low-price model. But, I do believe that other club owners who are considering such a move to the low-price model should not try it without also including a complete brand name change for their club, a brand name change to Planet Fitness, for example. I would not be writing this and accepting and publishing Planet Fitness advertising if I did not believe that conversion of an existing club to a Planet Fitness, using the low-price model, is one excellent alternative to closing your doors if you are now in an intensely competitive market, like many of you find yourselves today. *I believe that this discussion is all about a value proposition in the minds of consumers.* If you have an aging club, and you are in a position to spend the necessary money to upgrade and improve your club so well as to put it on complete par with your finest competitors,

then you will be able to come back and continue to compete well with any low-price model in your market. However, if your club is aging and no longer competitive in your market, and you do not have access to significant capital to bring your club product to a competitive position, I strongly caution you not to try the low-price model without also implementing a complete brand change to go along with your new, low-price model transition.

To just decrease your prices, while keeping the same club name and same market image out there, as it has been for years, is highly risky. It sends a distress signal to the community. In my opinion, the only reason Gordon Johnson has experienced even moderate success with this move is because of his excellence and experience as a 30+ year club owner/operator. There is a lot of industry buzz about how to compete with the low-price model, and rightfully so. There are also efforts in play, such as the **Gold's Gym Regional Roundtable**, to train club owner/operators, but it all boils down to the consumer, and you should never forget that. There is a body for every seat if you study your consumers and give them what they want, and you should never forget that, either. Mike Grondahl and Packy Wilson have done that, and both are doing great.

•**Late Breaking News: BONNIE**

PFIESTER, a **CLUB INSIDER Contributing Author** and one of our former cover subjects with her husband, **STEVE**, co-owner of **Longevity Fitness and Spa** in **Vero Beach, Florida**, tells me that there is a feature story in **Fitness Magazine** this month about their **Boot Camp Retreats**, produced at **GLORIA ESTEFAN's Florida Beach resort!** Bonnie has agreed to write, and **CLUB INSIDER** will publish, an article entitled, "**How to Produce Boot Camps.**" They do many boot camps every year, and we look forward to providing this "How to" article.

•**Congratulations to Dr. ART CURTIS**, who will become **IHRSA Chairman**, on **July 1, 2010**.

•To my long time and great friend, **DALE DIBBLE**, I hope you're feeling much better! **God bless you** and **OLIVE MAE!**

•**God bless our troops, airmen and sailors in the Middle East** and around the world as they protect America's freedoms and liberty. **God bless you, your family and your club(s). God bless America!** (Norm Cates, Jr. is a 36-year veteran of the health, racquet and sportsclub industry. Cates is the Founder and Publisher of **CLUB INSIDER**, now in its 17th year of publication. He may be reached at Norm@clubinsideronline.com)

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Programming Tip of the Month: Becoming an "Inclusive" Industry

By: Sandy Coffman

As most of you know, I am always looking for new programming opportunities and ways to market your club through innovative programming ideas. I speak mostly about creative, fun group programming activities in group exercise classes, fitness centers, pools and recreational departments, but it's really exciting when we can take advantage of a special piece of equipment that will grow your business, increase retention and make a difference in people's lives as well. I'm talking about the amazing NuStep Recumbent Cross Trainers. Let's be honest, we are always looking for that one new piece of equipment that we can buy to change our business. This may be it.

NuStep isn't new (founded in 1987), but its evolution and prominence into the fitness industry is. I got reacquainted with NuStep at IHRSA, San Diego when I helped to promote its fantastic influence

to the life of Kristina Rappatti, the LAPD veteran who was a featured presenter at the IHRSA conference. Kristina's focus is to encourage health and fitness clubs to provide inclusive and handicap-accessible products and programming for their members. Her story, as she explains her rehabilitation program using the NuStep is inspiring to say the least, but it speaks volumes to the word "inclusive."

This unique piece of equipment has some comfort and convenience features in addition to functional ones for several special needs and wants for markets just waiting to come into your clubs. NuStep has worked closely with physical therapists and healthcare professionals to develop a series of accessories that make their recumbent cross trainers safe, easy-to-use and more effective for a wide range of users and conditions. For example, a Leg Stabilizer offers advanced support for users with lower body deficiencies or weaknesses that require better leg

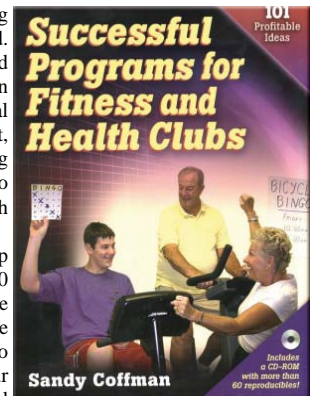
and foot alignment. The Well Grip maintains a neutral wrist position during workouts, ensuring good upper body exercise, and the low step-through design and the 360 degree swivel provides a smooth stepping motion and a safe transfer.

What does this have to do with you? I have a special chapter dedicated to programming for the aging market in *Successful Programs for Fitness and Health Clubs: 101 Profitable Ideas*, and I've been enthusiastic about programming this market for many years. The NuStep Recumbent Bike has been a popular piece of equipment for the older adult in many progressive retirement communities and wellness facilities. It would be a welcome sight to the market in our clubs. I was especially encouraged when several clubs who have already adopted the NuStep in their fitness center reported that it is used constantly. Almost all said they were looking to add more pieces.

Most importantly, we are seeing how we are able to serve markets with interests, abilities and needs that are

broader and more demanding than we had ever imagined. NuStep was originally designed for the cardiac rehabilitation setting, and it has a wide appeal for physical therapy clinics. But, its versatility includes training for outdoor race walking to improving range of motion with lower body deficiencies.

In addition, NuStep is able to support up to 600 pounds, making it ideal for the obese population to feel safe and secure while getting into an active healthy new life. Our industry is finally being forced to redefine who and how we serve. We must continue to create classes and programs that emphasize mind and spirit fitness in addition to exercises strictly for the physically challenged. We must develop more diversified programs, more "inclusive" programs for a more "inclusive" business. The markets are here, from the physically elite to the physically frail... from the committed fitness enthusiast to the inexperienced, active, inactive or aging customer, to the obese participant at any



age. These are the markets that want us and need us most. It's time to take another giant step forward to attracting them and to keeping them. The markets are ready, willing and able to try something different. Are you? (Sandy Coffman is the "Dean of Club Programming." To order Sandy's great programming book, *Successful Programs for Fitness and Health Clubs: 101 Profitable Ideas*, go to www.humankinetics.com. Contact Sandy at SLCoffman@aol.com or visit www.sandycoffman.com)

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