

Norm Cates'

CLUB INSIDER

CELEBRATING 28 YEARS OF TRUST

Dave Cardone and Memorial Athletic Club *Leadership Through Adversity*



Front Row (L to R): Renata Moran, Edie Garcia, Dave Cardone and Carrie Gimmestad
Back Row (L to R): Mirko Urriolagoitia, Craig Bissonett, Sue Donahoe Pierce, Kathy Veen and Vivian Lam

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CLUB INSIDER

CELEBRATING 28 YEARS OF TRUST

Dave Cardone and Memorial Athletic Club *Leadership Through Adversity*

By: **Justin Cates**

You are tired of COVID. I am tired of COVID. We are ALL tired of COVID! I get it, and though COVID will be an important part of this story, it is but only one part. The more important aspect of this month's cover story is one club owner/manager's ability and absolute determination to have his facility not only survive but provide much needed support to the community in which it operates during not one but two back-to-back disasters, the pandemic being the most recent.

This month's cover story is about **Dave Cardone**, Owner and General Manager of Memorial Athletic Club (MAC), and he is the humblest individual I have

ever had the opportunity to interview. I mean that sincerely.

Within this story about Dave and the MAC, you will learn the origins of each. But, importantly, you will learn about when times got tougher than tough, leagues beyond the day-to-day we all get used to. From a three-year that quickly became a five-year road project, which essentially closed one of the club's main arteries; to Hurricane Harvey, which devastated the community (during the road project); directly into the COVID-19 Pandemic, which we all know what that did... Dave and the MAC have been on a war footing for years.

They are still here, and if you are reading this, I hope that means you are still

here (in a professional sense), too. Further, I hope that means your staff is as well. That is the key, the secret sauce. As Dave explains in this story, the staff of the MAC has made the difference. Enabling them in their own realms, retaining them when all hell breaks loose, and honoring them as deserved has created a team at the MAC that rivals many in this industry.

Managers with 5, 10, 15 - 30+ years of experience are a great asset for an organization. Managers with those levels of experience at the same organization for all of that time is even better, and in the case of **Dave Cardone** and *Memorial Athletic Club*, it is turning the tide.

With that, I invite you to read on...
(See **Dave Cardone** Page 10)



Dave Cardone

Paul Grzymkowski Passes Away at Age 72

Fitness industry veteran and icon, **Paul M. Grzymkowski** passed away suddenly and unexpectedly on April 1, 2021 in Woodland Hills, California. He is survived by his devoted wife, **Joanna Gunst Grzymkowski**; brother **Peter Grzymkowski**; and sisters **Margaret Halstead**, **Christine Grzymkowski** and **Karen Grzymkowski**, as well as aunts and uncles, cousins, nieces, nephews and his godchildren. Paul and his twin sister Christine were born on March 5, 1949 in Rochester, New York to **Mary (Jacula)** and **Peter Grzymkowski**.

His business experience started at an early age with several enterprising businesses throughout grammar school and high school. Along with maintaining

a business major GPA of 4.0 throughout high school and college and lettering in the sports of wrestling and football, Paul (as a student) also owned and operated a building maintenance/landscaping company and a catering business. He received business degrees from *Monroe Community College* and *Rochester Business Institute*.

In April of 1980, Paul moved to Santa Monica, California to join his brother Pete as one of four managing partners of *Gold's Gym Enterprises, Inc.* With the title of *President and International Director of Gold's Gym Franchising, Inc.*, Paul, during his 19-year tenure with Gold's Gym, redefined the business aspect of the fitness industry by developing the first comprehensive franchising system for

facility operations. His efforts contributed to the opening of 535 franchised Gold's Gym fitness centers in 47 states and 24 countries, with over two million members (by the time they sold the business in 1999).

During his years in the fitness industry, Paul developed extensive domestic and global fitness contacts and business experience, pouring his whole heart into the work, creating what he called the "Gold's Gym family." He often hosted franchisees in his home with his fantastic cooking, warm heart and fascinating conversations. He stayed close to many of the people he worked with, especially **Scott Johannessen**, **Rich Minzer**, **Derek Barton** and **Neal Spruce**.

(See **Paul Grzymkowski** Page 6)



The Late Paul Grzymkowski

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- Exercise IS Medicine - **By:** Mike Alpert
- The Harsh Lessons of Failure... and Why They Matter to You - **By:** Thomas Plummer
- Why COVID Has Made Fitness Center Design More Important Than Ever - **By:** Bruce Carter
- An Industry Opportunity: Programming to Help COVID Survivors Recover - **By:** Bonnie Patrick-Mattalian
- Is the Fitness Club Industry Dead? - **By:** Matt Zagrodzky
- Live Group Fitness is the Answer... Again. - **By:** Terry Browning
- IHSA 2021 Moves to Dallas in October
- Gratitude... Belonging... Inspiration. Our "Third Place"
- And, of Course, *Norm's Notes*

Norm's Notes

■Hello Everybody! This is your **Club Insider Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993** checking in with our **329th** monthly edition of *Club Insider!* **WOW!** As we press on deeper into our 28th year of publishing, **I want to Thank You All** for reading this May edition! Also, **Thank You to all our Advertisers and Contributing Authors** who make this 28-year running trade publication possible. **THANK YOU ALL, and please accept the great Appreciation that JUSTIN and I have for your contributions to this LABOR OF LOVE we call Club Insider!**

■Is America a **GREAT COUNTRY, or what!**? As we move into the Summer months of 2021, **I sincerely hope that you, your family, your staff and your members have successfully avoided the Coronavirus.**

■I'm very sad to report to you all that **PAUL GRZYMKOWSKI**, my friend for many years, and one of the early owner/operators of *Gold's Gyms International*, suddenly and unexpectedly passed away

on **April 1, 2021 at age 72.** His passing was reportedly from acute Leukemia and kidney failure. Paul and his Brother, **Pete**, spent many years in our industry as the leaders of *Gold's Gyms International*. Over many years, I had the pleasure of getting to know Paul at the *IHRSA* and *Club Industry Shows*. At each event, we'd always spend some time together at my booth, as well as at receptions, catching up on what was going on in our industry and our lives. To say that Paul was **ONE OF A KIND** would be a **significant understatement.** I've had the pleasure of meeting and getting to know a lot of fine people in my blessed years in our industry, and I can honestly say here today, *without equivocation*, Paul Grzymkowski was one of the kindest and most excellent human beings I've ever met in our industry... a special industry that's full of outstanding people, and I know he will be sorely missed by all who knew him.

One of those people is our long-time friend, **JOHN McCARTHY, IHRSA Ex-officio Emeritus**, who sent the following comment to **JOANNA**, Paul's lovely widow, and I quote Big John McCarthy:

"Hi Joanna,

Over the years, Paul sent me many pictures of you and him together... All warm and beautiful... In every picture, his Love for you was always in his eyes. Paul was among the warmest and friendliest men I have ever had the pleasure of knowing... Everyone loved him, honored him, respected him and trusted him. Plus, everyone simply enjoyed being around him and being associated with him in any way. Wherever he was, he brought his own unique warmth, gentleness and joy. It was impossible to be sad in his presence... He had one of those exceptional personalities that lifted up everyone with whom he was with. Kindness was in his heart and in his voice and in his demeanor. An extraordinary man whom all of us were blessed to have as a friend... God bless you, Joanna...

With Warm Regards,

John McCarthy."

On April 2nd, Paul's wife, Joanna, contacted our friend, **DEREK BARTON**, and told him she'd taken Paul to their local Urgent Care on March 30th for some antibiotics. They immediately admitted him to the hospital saying that Paul had acute Leukemia and kidney failure. Paul passed away 36 hours later on April 1st. It was a complete surprise and shock to her and to all of us. Joanna's planning a memorial for Paul for family and closest friends. A Zoom link is now available at www.forevermissed.com/paul-michael-grzymkowski.

May our good friend, **PAUL**



Norm Cates

GRZYMKOWSKI, REST IN PEACE.

■Important News out of *IHRSA*. The **40th IHRSA Convention and Trade** has been moved to **Dallas, Texas** from **October 13-15, 2021**. From *IHRSA's Press Release*, "The shift from Los Angeles to Dallas is to ensure that *IHRSA* members, industry partners, federations and attendees from around the world will be able to safely gather to celebrate the fitness industry's revival at *IHRSA 2021*." To learn more and sign up for updates, go to ihrsa.org/convention.

■**HAPPY 75th BIRTHDAY** to my lovely wife, **ILENA**. We had a great celebration down in Florida with **JUSTIN CATES**. And, **HAPPY 75th BIRTHDAY** to the lovely **SUE DENISION**, the wife of our great friend, **RICK CARO**, our industry's (See *Norm's Notes* Page 7)

About Club Insider

CELEBRATING 28 YEARS OF TRUST

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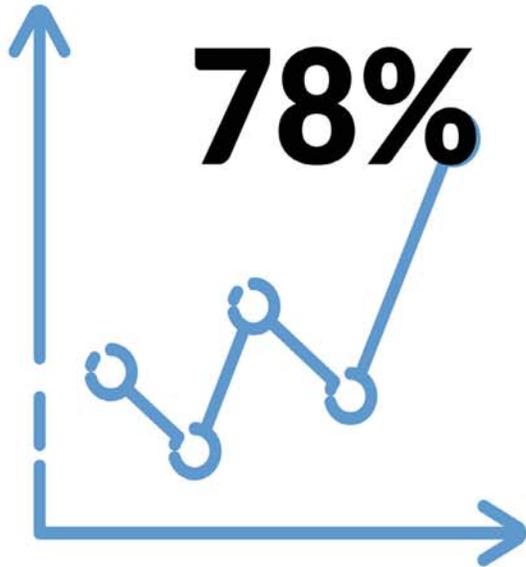
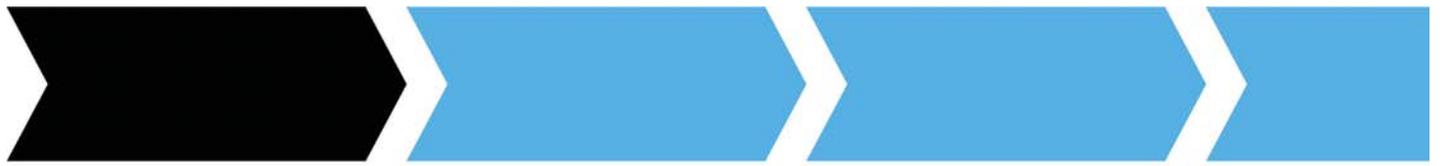
At *Club Insider*, we are excited to be in our **28th Year** of this home-based health and fitness club trade publication! The thought that this publication was *founded to serve an industry I truly love*, and so that *I could become a Mister Mom for my son, Justin*, is still *intriguing and amazing* to us. So, I wish to extend my most sincere **Thanks and Appreciation** to everyone who has made this amazing 28-year run possible.

A very sincere *Thanks and Appreciation* go to **Rick Caro**, the **late Dr. Gerry Faust** and the **Faust Executive Roundtable #1** for helping me decide in 1993 what my home-based business would be. *Thanks and Appreciation* to my long-time friends, **Ron Hudspeth** and **Cathy Miller**, formerly of **Atlanta's Hudspeth Report** for the tremendous assistance they provided. *Thanks and Appreciation* to all of the folks at **Walton Press** in Monroe, Georgia. They've done an absolutely excellent job for us all these years and have printed every one of our monthly editions! And, of course, *Thanks and Appreciation* to the **United States Postal Service** for sending those editions to our readers! *Thanks and Appreciation* to all of our **READERS**. Sincere *Thanks and Appreciation* to our **Club Insider Advertisers**, past and present, for their kind and dedicated support of this publication. *Thanks and Appreciation* to all of our **Club Insider Contributing Authors**, past and present. *Thanks and Appreciation* to *IHRSA* for all it does for all of us. And, sincere *Thanks and Appreciation* to my son, **Justin**, who has become our Publisher and is a truly great partner. You name it and Justin does it each and every month!

Last, but surely not least, this writer who refused to fear failure when many told him he didn't have a chance of surviving the publishing business for even a year did survive. And, he would like to give his sincere *Thanks and Appreciation* to the power that made that survival happen: **God**.

Very sincerely, with love in my heart for you all,

Norm Cates, Jr.



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Exercise IS Medicine

By: Mike Alpert

Thank goodness many health clubs have reopened after a year of being closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I know people are hungry to get back to a more normal lifestyle, and that will certainly mean a rush back to their club, which for many, has become their "second" home. You are going to have real opportunities to grow your business, but I urge you not to simply look at what worked before. Instead, look at what you need going forward to differentiate your club and provide a competitive advantage. What can you do to make your club a more valuable asset to your members?

COVID has changed everything. It has changed the way health care will be delivered in the future, meaning there will be a shift from simply treating disease and illness to a focus on prevention and wellness solutions. It is referred to as *Population Health*, moving away from sick care to health care and taking responsibility for not just treating people in the hospital but keeping them from having to go to the hospital. And, if they do need to be hospitalized, keeping them from having to return. This is where the health care system truly does come together working with health clubs and others in the community that promote exercise and wellness, not just health care delivery or sick care.

Overall, health includes nutrition, as well as exercise, and this presents a golden opportunity most clubs miss. It is a billion-dollar business. Most of our focus as an industry continues to be on cardio and

strength training with little, if any on proper nutrition programming. A person can work out seven days a week, and if they are not eating properly and eating healthy, they will not reach the ultimate goal of optimal health. Eating healthy and eating right are two different things, and most people need a qualified professional to educate them, guide them, follow their progress and modify their plan as needed.

One of the challenges for most clubs is that they do not retain a *Registered Dietician* or *Nutritionist* on their payroll due to the cost. But, what if you were able to share digital assets via your mobile platform (App) across clubs. In this case, digital assets would be a Registered Dietician (RD). An RD in Chicago could write a meal plan for a club member in California; evaluate information from a survey and a bio impedance scale (like InBody or MyZone); write a food plan and include a fitness plan; and meet with the member weekly via two-way video conferencing. The club supplying the RD would get a percentage of the fee charged by the club

delivering the plan and receiving payment for the plan from the member.

Now, think about this concept as we move into the post-COVID world. Think of merging health care with fitness, and eventually, third party reimbursement for programs that are actually working and promoting overall health and wellness. *Medical Nutrition Therapy* is one program available for reimbursement to qualified clubs. Think of how you can become an even more important resource to your members and your community. Consider building an educational library of videos and periodicals by physicians in your area on a host of topics like *Exercise and Brain Health*; *Exercise and Cancer*; *Exercise and Diabetes*; *Exercise and Fibromyalgia*, etc. The list is endless.

Today, more than ever, your members are seeking wellness solutions like never before. Why go to the Internet when they can access valuable information from the club they trust and support? In other articles, I have said the health care system is broken, and change is imminent.



Mike Alpert

COVID has certainly made us aware of this. Health care costs are a major strain economically on our country. As a country, the United States spends more on health care per person than other major industrialized nations; yet, despite this, we are ranked last in a study of the 11 major industrialized countries. And, according to the *World Health Organization (WHO)*, we ranked 37th out of 100 in overall health.

Become part of the solution, and in doing so, you will continue to be a major force in helping to build and maintain health and wellness in your community. *Positive proof that Exercise is Medicine.*

(Mike Alpert is the COO of Smart Health Clubs. He can be contacted at mike@smarthealthclubs.com or 951 - 205 - 1136.)

Make It Fun Every Day!

...Paul Grzymkowski

continued from page 3

Paul made a positive difference in the lives of almost everyone he touched, and in return, his time with Gold's Gym and all the business colleagues and franchisees he worked with meant the world to him. He really loved and lived Gold's Gym and was largely responsible for the domestic and international growth of the well-known fitness franchise.

In 1999, after Gold's Gym sold, Paul became a business and marketing advisor specializing in general business, franchising and licensing, strategic planning, along with dispute arbitration and negotiation. He sat on the board of three International Corporations and was involved with *Health Engineering Group*, *GetCycled*, *Kaatsu-Japan*, *Nutrimost*, *Quicksilver Scientific*, *Original Quinton*, and *Water & Wellness*.

Paul met Joanna Gunst in 1992. They quickly fell in love, and in 1996, they purchased a home in Topanga Canyon, California. They were engaged in 2000 and married in 2015. They both felt so much

gratitude to have found each other. Each year together was better than the last.

Paul was a very active and well-loved member of his Topanga community. He was *Head Usher at Corpus Christi Catholic Church* in Pacific Palisades, a *4th degree Knight of Columbus* and sat on the *Board of Directors of the Will Geer Theatrical Botanicum* (a non-profit repertory theatre and academy) for 12 years.

He worked with many charitable organizations such as *H.O.P.E. (Helping Other People Eat)*, *CERT (Community Emergency Response Team)*, *Arson Watch*, *T-CEP (Topanga Coalition for Emergency Preparedness)*, *The Topanga Trash Warriors*, *The Nature of Wildworks* (animal rescue which was especially close to his heart) and cooked monthly for the "Topanga Sages" dinner. He enjoyed gourmet cooking, ballroom dancing and the study of functional/preventative Medicine.

Paul's warmth, spirit and generous nature were evident in each and every aspect of his life, and he will be profoundly missed by the many people who were lucky enough to know him.

Due to the ongoing Coronavirus



L to R: Pete Grzymkowski, Paul Grzymkowski and Rich Minzer

pandemic, memorial services will be family and closest friends only. The family is hoping to air the event on Zoom for people

who cannot attend. More information can be found at forevermissed.com paul-michael-grzymkowski.

...Norm's Notes

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GREATEST and MOST LEGENDARY ICON. Sue celebrated her 75th birthday on **April 12, 2021**. **CONGRATULATIONS, SUE** and our very best wishes for many more happy and healthy birthdays during the years to come!

■ At this point in our May 2021 Edition, I feel it's important to extend my very sincere **THANKS and APPRECIATION to my son, partner, and Club Insider Publisher, JUSTIN CATES**, who on **April 5th, 2021**, celebrated his 1st Anniversary of being **Publisher!** Yes, folks, it has already been a year since Justin officially became *Publisher of Club Insider*, and to say that he's done a magnificent job since then would clearly be an understatement! Folks, I want to publicly express that sentiment because I know it has not been an easy job. If a pandemic wasn't enough, I went blind in both eyes in late March of 2020 and did not regain any sight until May 27th, 2020. Justin took the baton, ran with it, and *Club Insider* didn't miss a beat!

Thankfully, I've regained vision in my left eye, and I've been back on this keyboard helping Justin as best I can by writing Norm's Notes, articles and cover stories, as well as being part of our editing team, editing every edition entirely two times before we go to press. The **good Lord** has clearly blessed me by giving me back my eyesight in my left eye, and I'm doing just great these days reading, writing, driving (I just renewed my Georgia Driver's License for eight years), watching football when I can find a game somewhere and other TV shows and movies my lovely wife, **ILENA**, and I enjoy. **SO... to say that I'm a really LUCKY DUDE would definitely be accurate. The good Lord has truly blessed me! And, great job, Justin! Keep up the good work!**

■ **Welcome Back to Mike Alpert** as a regular *Club Insider Contributing Author*. Previously the *President & CEO of The Claremont Club*, Mike is now the *COO of Smart Health Clubs*. Check out his **Article** this month on the **Opposite Page**.

■ **CONGRATULATIONS to the four new IHRSA Board Members** who were elected at IHRSA's first ever virtual Board Meeting with the results announced on April 7, 2021. The four new IHRSA Board Members who will serve beginning in July 2021 are:

- **LUKE CARLSON**, *CEO of Discover Strength* in Minneapolis, MN;
- **AARON MOORE**, *Vida Fitness and Aura Spa* in Washington, D.C.;
- **JOSE TEIXEIRA**, *SC Fitness Head of Customer Experience* in Lisbon, Portugal; and
- **LONI WANG**, *CEO of Catic Wellness Group, Ltd.* in Shenzhen, China.

Outgoing *IHRSA Board Chair*, **CARRIE KEPPLER**, conducted a *State of the Industry Address* at the meeting. And, *IHRSA Interim President and CEO*, **Brent Darden**, presented the *State of IHRSA* and updated the membership on new and ongoing initiatives. Prior to the annual meeting, the IHRSA Board of Directors elected *new leadership* for the 2021 - 2022 fiscal year, and as of July 1, 2021, these folks will be IHRSA's leaders:

- **ALAN LEACH**, *CEO, Sales Trainer, and Director of Sales and Marketing for the West Wood Club* in Dublin, Ireland, will serve as **Board Chair**;
- **CHRIS CRAYTOR**, *President and COO for acac Fitness & Wellness Centers* in Charlottesville, VA, will serve as **Vice Chair of the Board**;
- **BRAD WILKINS**, *President of Cooper Health and Fitness* in Dallas, TX, will serve as **Treasurer**;
- **MICHELLE MELKERSON - GRANRYD**, *General Manager of Castle Hill Fitness 360* in Austin, TX, will serve as **Secretary**; and
- **CARRIE KEPPLER**, *Managing Director of Styles Fitness Centers* in Peoria, IL, will serve as **Ex-officio Chair**.

We should all extend sincere **Thanks and Appreciation** to **STEVE CAPEZZONE**, *CEO of Healthtrax International*; **JIM WORTHINGTON**, *Ex-officio Chair and Owner, President and CEO of Newtown Athletic Club*; and **ANASTSASIA YUSINA**, *CEO of Strata Fitness Holdings and FITSPACE Studios*, for their years of service and dedication to the fitness industry. To ensure a smooth transition, they will each serve as advisors to the Board for the remainder of 2021.

■ Following up on what I started doing in our *March 2021 Norm's Notes*, here's **IHRSA's most recent list of Government Thrusts and Initiatives** as reported by IHRSA's **JAKE LANDRY**. Folks, in the wild, wild world we all now know and live in, from coast to coast, and depending upon what your mindset is, this list could be **good news** or it could be **bad news**. But, one thing's for sure, this list is provided on a regular basis by Jake Landry, and it contains dependable information you can trust to be accurate, and hopefully, you'll find information about legislative activity in your State that will be helpful to you, because that's always our goal here at *Club Insider*. So, here goes:

- **Texas** Files Bill Requiring Notification Before Auto-Renewal;
- **Indiana** Bill Regulating Gift Cards Passes;
- **Alabama** to Consider Bill Regulating Automatic Renewal of Free Trials;
- **Virginia** General Consumer Data Privacy Bill Sent to Governor for Signature;
- **Illinois** Considers Two Bills to Amend Biometric Information Privacy Act;
- **Two Bills** to Amend Illinois Biometric Information Privacy Act Set for Hearings;
- **Illinois** Bill Regulating Automatically

- Renewing Contracts Set for Hearing;
- **Florida** Files Bill Requiring Notification Before Auto-Renewal;
- **Montana** Bill Easing Restrictions on Lifeguard Training Set for Hearing;
- **Kentucky** Passes Bill Regulating Massage Therapy;
- **Utah** Passes Bill Impacting Bonding, Online Cancellation and Automatic Renewal;
- **New York** Considers Bill Restricting Collection of Personal and Biometric Data;
- **Massachusetts** to Consider Bill Regulating AEDs and Emergency Response Plans;
- **New Jersey** to Hear Three Consumer Data Protection Bills;

- **Two Bills** to Amend Illinois Biometric Information Privacy Act Set for Hearings, One Advances;
 - **Washington** General Consumer Data Privacy Bill Gets Hearing;
 - **Wyoming** Sales Tax Proposal Does Not Advance;
 - **New Hampshire** Auto Renew Bill Dies in Committee;
 - **Ohio** to Consider Bill Regulating Massage Therapy in Hearing;
 - **Two Illinois** Bills Regulating Automatically Renewing Contracts Set for Hearing;
 - **Texas** to Consider Bill Amending Health
- (See *Norm's Notes* Page 8)



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...Norm's Notes

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Club Statute;

- Arizona to Hold Hearing on Bill Expanding Options for Cancellation of Health Club Contracts;
- North Carolina to Hold Hearing on Auto-Renewing Contracts Bill;
- Illinois Bill Changing Requirements of Auto-Renewing Contracts Voted Out of Committee;
- Lawmakers in Connecticut Propose Bill Requiring AEDs in Health Clubs;
- Colorado Files Bill Regulating Automatically Renewing Contracts;
- Connecticut Bill Requiring AEDs in Health Clubs Set for Hearing;
- Colorado Considers Bill Restricting Collection of Biometric Data;
- Arizona Bill Expanding Options for Cancellation of Health Club Contracts Voted Out of Committee;
- Ohio Considers Bill to Lift Sales Tax for Nonprofit Clubs;
- Colorado Bill Regulating Automatically Renewing Contracts Set for Hearing;
- Illinois Legislature Unlikely to Consider Multiple Consumer Bills Further;

■ California Bill Regulating Automatically Renewing Contracts Set for Hearing.

Thanks to Jake Landry and IHRSA. And, STAY TUNED, FOLKS!

■ Last month, in April's Edition of Norm's Notes, I mentioned to you all that I was getting back on a weight-lifting program, which is something I've not done for many moons. **I've kept my vow**, and I'm now on a regular weight-lifting program for my upper body. Starting out, I am doing three sets of three lifts with ten reps for each set. The lifts are: *Standing Rows, Standing Curls and Standing Presses*. Let me also share with you the great news that **my right hip replacement surgery is set for Thursday, May 6th**. So, I'm hoping to be recovered from my hip surgery and back on my daily walking program by June 1st with the goal of being able to slowly build back to my normal *3.2 miles of walking per day* by not later than September 1st.

Over the course of 15 or so years, before I developed this hip problem, I **walked over 18,000 miles with 3.2 miles per day being a minimum. Once in a while I'd do 6.4 miles**. But... when I started

having hip problems and the associated pain caused by them, I stopped my six-day-a-week walking program.

But, for sure, in time for the **40th IHRSA Convention and Trade Show**, now moved to **Dallas, Texas from October 13 - 15, 2021**, my goal is to have my mileage back up to 3.2. miles per day. I sure hope to see you all in Dallas where we'll be *celebrating the 40th Anniversary of IHRSA!* This great event should be lots of fun, and I hope you'll drop by and visit us at the *Trade Show*, as well as visit and support our advertisers at the IHRSA Trade Show. We'll have those booth #s for you as soon as available! **Stay Tuned Folks!**

■ Folks, be sure to mark your calendars and **Save the Dates for Club Industry's next FUTURE of FITNESS Virtual Event this June 16 - 17, 2021**. These Club Industry Future of Fitness Virtual Meetings are excellent learning opportunities for all of us! Go to futureoffitness.clubindustry.com to sign up, and don't miss it!

■ **JUSTIN and I** want to say **Thanks for reading Club Insider!**

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(Norm Cates, Jr. is a 47-year veteran of the health, racquet and sportsclub industry. He is the Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993 of Club Insider, now in its 28th year of monthly publication. In 1981, he was IHRSA's First President, and a Co-Founder of the Association with Rick Caro and five others. In 2001, he was honored by IHRSA with its DALE DIBBLE Distinguished Service Award, one of its highest honors. And, in 2017, he was honored with Club Industry's Lifetime Achievement Award. He can be reached by phone at 770-635-7578 or email at Norm@clubinsideronline.com.)

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...Dave Cardone

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An Interview With Dave Cardone, Owner and General Manager of Memorial Athletic Club

Club Insider (C.I.) - Where were you born, and where did you grow up?

Dave Cardone (DC) - I was born in Southern California, and I grew up out there.

C.I. - Where did you go to school and what did you study?

DC - I studied General Business and Marketing at a small community college in Southern California. I was a high school athlete and did a little bit of college track. Then, while I was going to school full-time, I started working at a local tennis and racquetball club, and that eventually became full-time. So, I was going to school full-time and working full-time, and that was a challenge. This was in the early '80s, so we were beginning the transition into fitness.

C.I. - When and how did you become involved with the *Memorial Athletic Club*?

DC - It was actually the sister club to the one I was working at during college, and it was owned by a couple of common partners. It was just a racquetball club in the early '80s, and it was a slow to transition into fitness. About the time I was attempting to complete college, my wife, **Joyce**, was also graduating as an RN. The opportunity came up for us to move down to Houston and take over the club operations.

It was in the mid-80s, so the market down here was in terrible shape because of the oil bust and the banking crisis. The partnership needed somebody to come down, so they gave me a small piece of the pie to move. This was at a time that most people were leaving Houston, so it gave me an opportunity to buy a house at a very reasonable price.

C.I. - Please describe your primary facilities (Size and Square Footage, Amenities, Programs/Services, etc.).

DC - We started as a racquetball club, so we were only about 23,000 square feet at that time. We have done some kind of major construction project every four or five years to expand, so now, we are close to 50,000 square feet. Group exercise is a big part of our offerings. We have three studios and offer 170 classes a week. There's a *Parisi Speed School*, which is a source of great pride. The cardio and strength equipment area has grown over the years and is now about 16,000 square feet. We have two pools: an indoor pool that is six lanes and an outdoor pool that is five lanes, both operating year-round. During the pandemic, we added a 3,000 square-foot outdoor area to be used for personal training. Now, we are also starting to play Pickleball on it. There is also an 8,000 square-foot *MAC for Women* facility.

C.I. - Please tell us a little more about your aquatic center and offerings.

DC - The pools are included in membership and truly service people of all ages. Adult athletes have access to a Master's Swim program, and we have a very popular water aerobic/exercise program. We do about 4,000 swimming lessons a year for kids. Most of those are very low volume with two or three kids in a class, so it is high-quality. We use the *Red Cross Curriculum*. We have been running the swim program for almost 30 years. It all started with our outdoor pool, which was built in 1987. Then, indoor pool in 1999. Much of the credit goes to our *Aquatic Director, Kathy Veen*. I call her our 'Orchestra Conductor.' She keeps it all in tune.

C.I. - Please tell us a little bit more about your *MAC for Women* facility.

DC - It is 8,000 square feet, and it is actually right across the street. We opened that about 20 years ago. That property is a



The Memorial Athletic Club (MAC)

leased space, and at the time it began, we needed to grow all of our amenities in order to accommodate demand. Somebody had tried to open up a club in competition with us, and it only lasted about six months. So, the landlord and the banker came to me and asked, 'What can you do?' That was when we decided to take the opportunity to try and offer a women's only club. It has created a nice little niche and is a comfortable environment.

C.I. - What do you consider the key market differentiators for the company?

DC - Really, it is personal care. I have been able to put together a great team. The average tenure of my management team is 25 years. And, a couple of my managers have been with me for over 30 years. It takes years to find those kind of teammates.

I have had some stars come in a little bit more recently that blended right in and have contributed greatly to the program. The team we have been able to put together is the secret sauce, so to speak. That is a trickle-down... I have a good team, and they are able to get a good team, so it ends up being a great organization because of them.

C.I. - I welcome you to share the names, work areas and tenures of your stars.

Craig Bissonett (Facilities) - 38 years;
Joyce Cardone (Abit of everything) - 33 years;
Kathy Veen (Aquatics) - 32 years;
Sandra Batres (Childcare) - 30 years;

Jeff Biehl (Fitness) - 29 years;
Vivian Lam (Accounting) - 20 years;
Sue Donahoe Pierce (Fitness/MAC for Women) - 20 years;
Wendy Wester (Aquatics) - 20 years;
Carrie Gimmedstad (Group X and Member Engagement) - 16 years;
Chris Daughtry (Parisi Speed School) - 10 years;
Edie Garcia (Group X) - 5 years;
Mirko Urriolagoitia (Desk Operations) - 5 years.

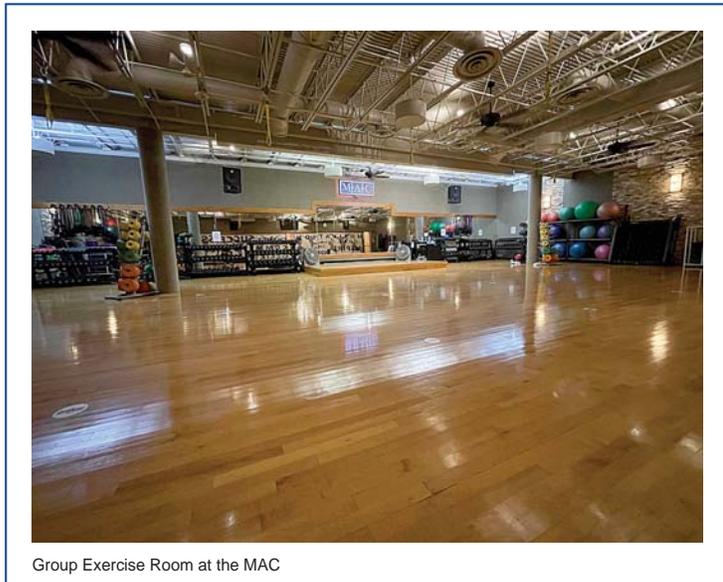
Disaster Strikes... Twice.

C.I. - In 2017, disaster struck with Hurricane Harvey. Please tell us about that experience and its aftermath.

DC - Well, I would say what prepared and helped me learn perseverance was when I first moved to Houston in the mid-80s... We were just a racquetball club, and we knew we needed to become a fitness club, just like all court clubs have had to evolve over the years. But, that was a huge challenge with the banking crisis and the real estate crisis that went with it. It was all started by the oil crisis, and it created a triple whammy problem for Houston. No banks would look at you for financing, and there wasn't much hope to try and salvage the partnership and the business. So, it took four or five years of perseverance to get through. Eventually, we got SBA financing to do our first big expansion, so that got us a foundation to build on. The fortunate thing is that, when a crisis comes up, you go back to that foundation and you have to start rebuilding. It was something we knew we could do.

First, in 2015, a road construction project that became a five-year project when it was only supposed to take two-and-a-half years. It created an isolation bubble where our club was separated from the majority of our market because of numerous construction projects that were

(See **Dave Cardone** Page 11)



Group Exercise Room at the MAC



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...Dave Cardone

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going on at one time.

Then, in 2017, Hurricane Harvey hit central and southeast Texas. When that happened, we had about 50 inches of rain over three days. Harvey filled a couple reservoirs that surround West Houston. When they had to start releasing water out of those reservoirs to keep them from bursting, it created a flooding situation that went right down the middle of Houston. We had water about 400 yards from our building going through the neighborhoods, and it was the saddest thing. These were established neighborhoods with beautiful pieces of property along a bayou that had great green belt along it. The people who lived in those houses were our customers, and many had been with us for 35 - 40 years. Seeing the people at that age and the suffering they had to go through was just devastating. It is estimated that 30% of the homes in our community flooded or had some lingering damage. This included 29 staff members.

The water stayed at a constant height for about two-and-a-half weeks while the reservoirs drained, and we just had to wait. There wasn't much we could do. As an organization, we tried to reach out to customers and do as much as we could. We coordinated some boats and were

helping them get back into their houses to get their valuables and prescriptions. Eventually, after we got our power back, we were able to open up our locker rooms so people could come in and shower. A lot of the areas still didn't have power because the substations were submerged. It was 95 degrees and high humidity. People were trying to salvage what they could from their houses before the mold took over, so it was just brutal. Having a place where they could go for air conditioning, clean water and showers was all we could do for them.

C.I. - Essentially, you were kind of a mini-FEMA?

DC - The clubs are always part of the community. It created an opportunity for us to use our assets to really help people when they needed it most. There was a Mormon volunteer group that came in to do what is called 'mucking' the houses, which is where they bust out the sheet rock, take out the carpet, furniture and everything else damaged by water and mold. So, once the water receded and people could travel again in and around Houston, we housed some of these groups that were coming in from out of town. They were coming in to help our customers, so we just became part of the chain that was providing assistance.

The members would come into the club and meet up with their friends. They

would talk about the trials and tribulations of cleaning out their houses and dealing with insurance companies... Did the water come from below? Did it come from above? Should it be covered by the policy? Should it not? What about the mold? So, the club just became a central point in the community for many reasons, and we just did whatever we could to help.

C.I. - Where in the recovery process were you when COVID hit?

DC - While the road construction was still going on, we lost about 10% of our members during Harvey. Quite a few kept their membership active and still utilized the club, which we were very grateful for, but it was a very painful thing for our neighborhood. It took a little while for us to bring our cash flow back and to get people reactivated. Then, the road construction work intensified, and it was completed. For a couple weeks, we saw the clean roads and easy access to our parking lot again. Then, all of a sudden, COVID hit, so we went from one thing to another.

C.I. - Please take us through your experience during the pandemic. Let's start with the shutdown (PPP? Dealing with mortgage/vendors? What happened to staff? Communication with members and staff? Digital content? Etc.).

DC - Probably the most important thing that was a key for us being able to survive was, and this has come up many times in our durability, is that we own our property. We didn't have to go to a landlord and ask for assistance. We had our property and our equity to draw from, and that was the parachute that helped us land safely. With the Women's Club, we do have a lease. The landlord was helpful and patient with us as we had to cut back on our cash flow, and of course, shut down the facility for a time. It was very hard, but we kept our staff. I kept all my full-time people paid, and everybody had medical benefits. PPP was a huge help.

Over the years, we have utilized the *Small Business Administration (SBA)* numerous times. In the early '90s, towards the end of the banking crisis, the SBA was the only pathway to obtaining conventional financing. Back in 2008, we had damage from Hurricane Ike, and we had to use the SBA while we battled with our insurance carrier for the damage claim. So, it was a process I was familiar with.

I know some banks had a hard time catching on to PPP. I feel like it was somewhat genius to have the banks be the facilitators of PPP, and it probably saved thousands of businesses because most banks were able to react quickly. However,

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when PPP came out, it was obvious my bank was failing at administering PPP applications. I had to switch banks in mid-April to be able to get PPP funding before funds ran out. It was high anxiety to say the least, but we are so grateful we were able to keep everyone employed.

Obviously, it has been challenging for all clubs. The support from IHRSA, and in particular, my REX Roundtable Group (ROWDY) was absolutely invaluable. We started doing Zoom meetings every week, commiserating, sharing best practices, ideas, etc. If it wasn't for the close contact with my REX Roundtable Members, we would have probably been stuck in the water going around in circles.

Additionally, we wouldn't have survived without the creativity my team put together to try and do things for our customers. As COVID hit, we created digital content and streamed classes, as well as inspirational messages we sent to members through email and social media. We tried to keep people engaged, and my team really did a great job. During the shutdown, I made sure that every email to the club was answered within minutes, around the clock. I wanted our customers to know, in no uncertain terms, that we were here for them. That was exhausting, but it became a tangible effort to direct our focus.

C.I. - Please take us through the reopening (Initial restrictions? Getting members back? Etc.).

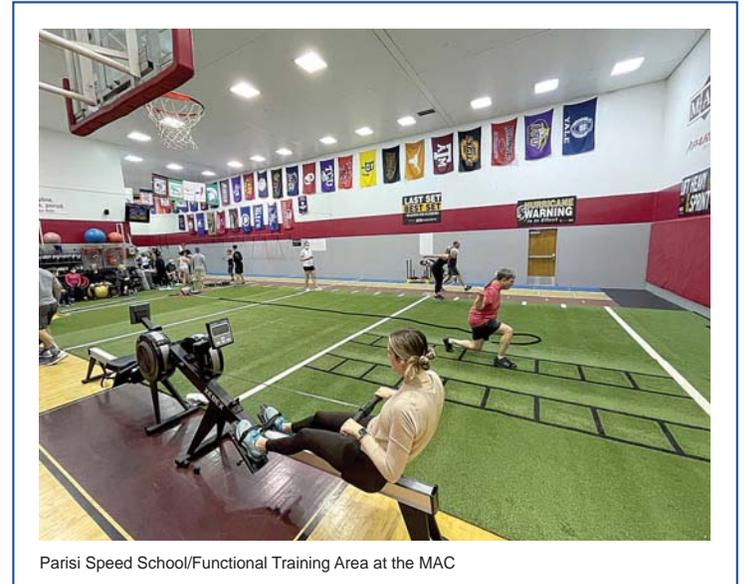
DC - We were able to reopen towards the end of May. What we tried to do was take away all the touch points. We put in automated doors coming into the building. We took away doors to the locker rooms. Obviously, we put in hand sanitizer stations. We employed a staff to patrol the fitness areas as *Health Guards*, an idea that came

from my REX Roundtable group and added to the member's feeling of confidence while using our equipment. In the pools, we established a *Lane Reservations System*. This allowed an uninterrupted period for someone to swim, while physically distanced from other users. Staff sanitized the touch points around the pools after each use. This was a huge positive for our most at-risk population who utilized the pools.

We continued to communicate regularly with the members. Very soon after COVID hit, I was able to procure a bunch of UV lamps to put in my air handling systems. At the time, people hadn't really heard about it, but as time went on, more and more people understood how effective that was at purifying the air. So, that was one of those things that wasn't obvious to the members, but it became important to our processes.

My wife being a nurse, and us having one son who is an MD and another son who is a PhD, we have been very involved with the medical side of this event. So, we were getting scientific information to support everything else that was going on. This served as a seal of approval for our members to make sure that what we are doing is safe. We found everything we possibly could do to make our customers feel comfortable, because from the very beginning, I knew that our recovery was going to be based on consumer confidence. Their confidence is going to be dictated by what the media does, what they see from the businesses that they venture into, what their friends say, what their doctors tell them, etc. All those things contribute, and we just wanted to do everything we could to take away any negatives. Our industry has always been the wholesome go-to place, and we could always be very proud of what we offer our customers and what we do for a living; then, all of a sudden, we were in the top three places people should avoid.

Continuously hearing negatives



Parisi Speed School/Functional Training Area at the MAC

about our industry was hard. It was hard on the staff. It was hard on us who have the feeling that the credibility we have tried to create over the years is now being taken away by what the media is saying or what this virus is doing. So, we just really tried to do everything we could to try and build that confidence. And, knowing that we had 35% of our members on hold, our efforts needed to be sincere. Those people were concerned, and we needed to be reverent to their feelings.

C.I. - What are the challenges of safety now in fully open state? How are you dealing with mask usage for staff? Members?

DC - The staff is still required to wear masks at all times. The instructors are 10 to 12 feet away from the members when teaching a class, then they can take their masks off during instruction. For the members, we are requiring them to wear face masks in all common areas and when not actively exercising. We are still doing social distancing and spacing of equipment, spacing within the classes, etc. So, we are still taking a lot of precautions. Our childcare is going to open up in early May. Other limitations are being reviewed for adjustment in the coming weeks. We are watching the hospitalization numbers and the spread rate within the *Texas Medical Center* in the Houston region. We are also watching the total case numbers in the local school district. *We are using statistics to drive our decisions.*

We have been slow to fully reopen,

and we still have members on hold status. When I am down at the front desk, I am hearing phone calls continuously. People are asking, 'Okay, what are you doing? I got my vaccine, but I still want to be careful.' I don't want to immediately flip the switch and change our methodology, which would then scare the people who have built up a comfort level being back in our programs. We are going to come back gradually, just as their confidence is going to build gradually. It will be a steady transition to avoid alienating those with strong feelings on all sides of the issues.

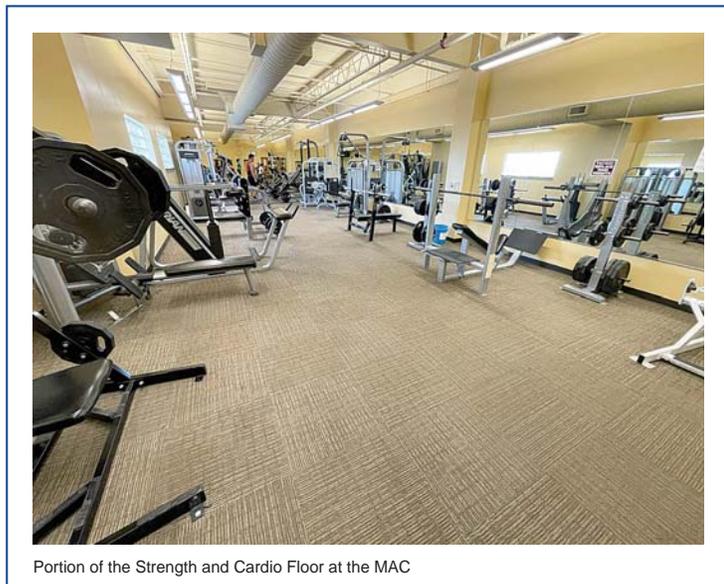
C.I. - Please update us on some of your current KPIs:

- % still on freeze, etc.: 35%
- % usage/check-ins vs March 2020: 65%
- % non-dues revenue vs. March 2020: We shut down in mid-March 2020, so for *January and February* comparisons, we are at 62% ancillary income.
- % new sales vs. cancellations for 1Q21: *January was flat.* The post-holiday spike in cases dampened hopes. *February and March* have had a slight net gain.

C.I. - When do you expect to be back to pre-disaster levels?

DC - As an industry, it is going to take time. I don't think we are really going to be back to normal until maybe next Spring. I think there is going to be a little bit of a recoil as we go into the fall flu season. A percentage of society is going to be very kitchy for a while. And, knowing that COVID have been around for a long time, I think that next time there is a COVID event, just the way SARS was or MERS or H1N1, when there is talk of something like that, there is probably going to be a bit of a recoil. *We are going to have to deal with it.* So, we are not going to be able to abandon the precautions we are taking in some respects because there are

(See *Dave Cardone* Page 13)



Portion of the Strength and Cardio Floor at the MAC



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...Dave Cardone

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people who are going to be concerned for a long time.

As a club, we will get back. Our roads are completed. That is a huge plus. Every day driving in, it reminds me that hope is on the horizon. After we get through the winter season, with the benefits of the first-of-year sales and all that, I do think it will be more normal in 2022. I know that a lot of people have home equipment. When home exercise equipment first became a thing that we talked about 15 or 20 years ago, I think a lot of clubs might have been scared. My personal feeling is that, if people do a little bit at home, and then that gives them the motivation to continue using our programs. This gives us the challenge to make our programs enticing so that they continue their exercise with us. I think the pandemic could potentially increase awareness for wellbeing and wellness, good healthcare and taking care of yourself to make yourself more immune to something that might arise in the future. In the long run, I think it is going to benefit the clubs that provide those programs and can contribute to these people's lifestyles in a positive way. And, I think it could expand the fitness industry penetration into society.

I will also say that I am very

encouraged by the number of people who are buying exercise clothes and exercise shoes. Seeing the statistics on the spending habits of what people did during the shutdown, I think that is very encouraging for our industry.

C.I. - Did any local clubs close permanently, and did that/will that help you reach those previous levels?

DC - No, we didn't see any local commercial clubs permanently close. A lot of the corporate facilities had shut down their fitness centers temporarily, so that might have increased our traffic a little bit for those people who live in our area.

C.I. - To close out this tough discussion about the disasters you faced and your responses to them, what are you most grateful for coming out of Harvey and COVID? Most proud of?

DC - Well, I am grateful for my team. They stuck through the thick and thin of it all. They also really rose to the occasion. They expanded their knowledge for technology and got out of their comfort zones to start doing the online classes and create online followings. They really worked hard to get ahold of people. I made a point of being at the club every day, but they were continuously reaching out to me, 'Hey, what can we do to help?' I wouldn't have made

it through without them, so I am grateful for and proud of them.

I am also very proud of how the club was able to help the community. My wife became very involved in helping people find a vaccine. We responded to anybody who reached out to us directly or via social media. She gave links and contact information to hundreds of people when they were saying they didn't know where to go, what to do, etc. We have a mature population, and some of them are not as savvy with technology. So, we helped them in finding access or information. I think we raised our level of community support to a new level by doing so.

Leadership Through Adversity

C.I. - Please describe some of the strengths and weakness of being an independent club owner.

DC - Over the years, getting through the whole crisis in the '80s and other various things, I think that taught a certain level of perseverance. I knew there were resources out there, so finding them and utilizing them was important. As an independent operator, you have to be resourceful. There is no umbrella of protection; there is nobody who is going to save you. So, that is one of the challenges, but it is also one of the blessings of being a club operator.

As I mentioned before, I think owning our own property was probably the most fundamentally important aspect of persevering. Without that, what equity do you have to use? And, without that, how do you fight? That was really important, especially during COVID. Also, again, the support of the REX Roundtables. They have become a Board of Directors, a sounding board. You hear the great things, and they are also honest with you and tell you something you might not want to hear. But, it is what you *need* to hear, so it is invaluable.

C.I. - Absolutely. I feel REX gives some of the smaller players that corporate umbrella feel that you mentioned before and the Board of Directors without having to deal with some of the stakeholders of it in the traditional sense.
DC - Yes, absolutely. And, of course, IHRSA has played a huge role in our industry and all the individual clubs. One of the things that drew me into the club business was the idea that, in a club, you are an entrepreneur, you are a little bit of everything. There is fitness, yes. But, there is marketing. There is accounting work that goes into it. There is banking work. There is real estate. There is a bit of everything when you own a club, and that was very attractive to me.

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If it wasn't for IHRSA, I wouldn't be here. My first 'IRSA' (now IHRSA) convention was in the mid-80s. It was either in Reno or Las Vegas, and it made a huge impression. The content that came out of that was more important than anything I learned in school, just in that four or five days. I specifically remember a two-day seminar that **Mike Chaet** had provided, then the four or five days of IRSA, and by the end, I had a notebook full of notes. That was such an important foundation to our success.

In the early years, the equipment manufacturers and industry reps taught us so much, going back to **Ray Wilson** and **Augie Nieto** when *Lifecycle* first came out, then **Rich Hanson** with *Nautilus* and *StairMaster*. I previously mentioned that we have a *Parisi Speed School*, and I think it was **Alex Martinez** who had originally told me this 20 years ago when **Bill Parisi** was just starting to expand his concept. He said, 'You should really check this out.' That is what got me interested. So, the information from outside sources like the reps and the manufacturers was extremely important for an independent club operator to grow.

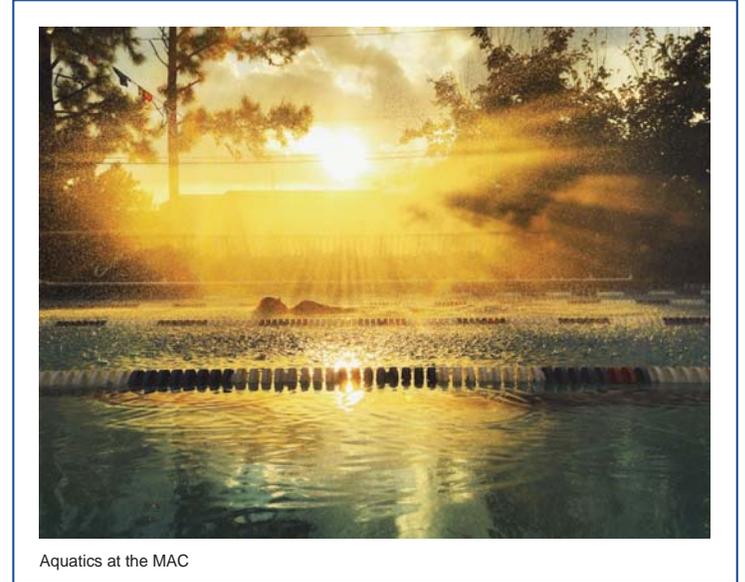
Very importantly, I have been able to meet a lot of the leaders of the industry who have been mentors. And, they have always been gracious and generous with their time when we are exploring ideas. Before we did the Women's Only Club, an industry leader allowed me to come in for a day and talk with him because he had a similar annex.

Your Dad, **Norm Cates**, is one of those people, especially with what he's given back to the industry through the trade publication, *Club Insider*. And, of course, **Rick Caro**. I remember driving

to a Roundtable meeting after Hurricane Harvey. It was up in Arkansas, and the Roundtable had said, 'Look, we know your area is still underwater, but come up here. We will do everything we can to help you.' So, I left the club and went up there and talked with Rick Caro for about two hours in the car. Because of his expertise in insurance, he gave me some guidance about how I should proceed with my insurance carrier, as well as a lot of encouragement. So, the leaders of this industry have just gone out of their way and have been lifelines, and having that openness and access has been invaluable.

C.I. - Leadership is challenging enough. Please describe leadership in the face of adversity. In your case, not one but two disasters back-to-back. **DC** - My team has worked together for a long time, but we still make a point of meeting face-to-face every week for an hour-and-a-half to two hours. No matter how busy we are, we make a point of getting together. Our meetings are more like a Boardroom; we all contribute. They are the masters of their programs, and I respect that and what they do. I trust their leadership and their departments. When we make decisions, we make decisions together. Importantly, they approach and feel the same way about their people. It is the people on the front line who really make it happen. It is an upside-down pyramid; your front line is the number one at the top of the food chain. Sometimes, you have to be heavy and come down and correct things, but the front line is really the most important part.

C.I. - As we have some light at the end of the tunnel, what advice do you have for how to prepare for future crisis of any kind? **DC** - That's hard; you just don't know. The pandemic event has been something new



Aquatics at the MAC

for clubs. And, just when you think you have seen it all, you will see something else. Coincidentally, I was reading a book just a few weeks before the pandemic hit. It was *Shut Up and Listen!* by **Tilman Fertitta**. He owns the *Houston Rockets*, as well as the *Golden Nugget Casino and Hotels* and a large chain of restaurants. Obviously, he was hit horribly hard by the pandemic, as well as problems within the Rockets organization this year. So, he has definitely taken some blows. One thing he said in his book was, 'around every corner there is something waiting to take you out.' I think he used a little more colorful language. But, I read that just a few weeks before COVID hit, and it's absolutely right. There can always be something around every corner.

You might not be prepared for everything, but attacking the problems and finding a way, there is a solution to everything. It takes patience and perseverance. A lot of times, when you feel an initial response, you have to keep your emotions in check and work the problem. Try to be as unemotional as possible. But, look at things empathetically and try to take all things into consideration, and you will be able to find an answer.

C.I. - To close out this candid interview, where does Memorial Athletic Club go from here (next 2 - 3 years)? What about the industry as a whole?

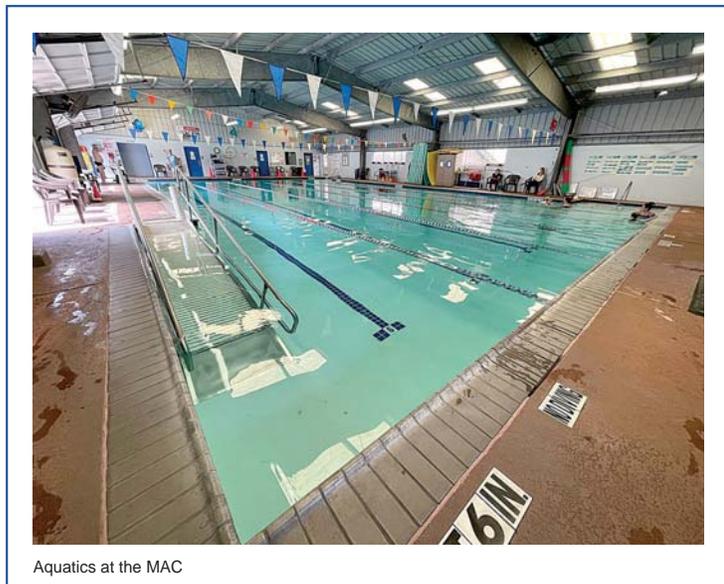
DC - As the industry comes back, I do think there is going to be a little bit more demand for quality. The consumers will be heading towards quality because they will have an increased awareness of things like COVID. Also, an increased awareness of the importance of wellness care for themselves. I hope a little bit more talk in the general public about trying to eliminate comorbidities. If we can get away from the fear of that politically correct conversation, more people can be aware of the need to take care of themselves. That is huge for our industry because we are in a unique position to step into that role.

C.I. - Despite how tough things have been, it is encouraging to think about the future. *Club Insider* will be here to report about it!



My sincere appreciation to **Dave Cardone** for his time interviewing for this story, as well as assistance with photos and graphics.

(Justin Cates is the Publisher of *Club Insider*. Having been born into a club business family in 1985, Justin grew up in the health and fitness club industry. He has lived and breathed this industry for 36 years, since his own day one, and he loves it dearly. Graduating from the Terry College of Business at The University of Georgia in 2007, Justin has run day-to-day operations of *Club Insider* for 13 years. Justin was elevated to Publisher of *Club Insider* on April 5, 2020. Justin's Dad, Norm Cates, continues to serve as Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993. You can reach Justin by phone at 863-999-2677 or email at Justin@clubinsideronline.com.)



Aquatics at the MAC



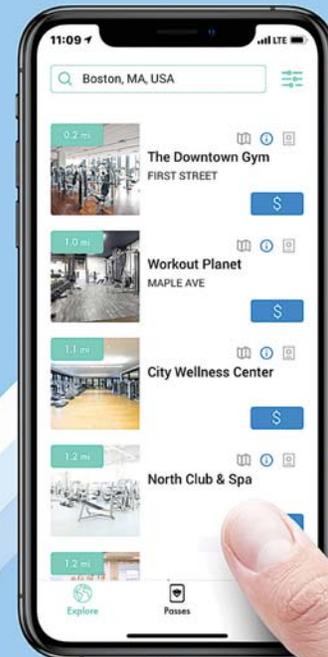
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IHRSA 2021 Moves to Dallas in October

Publisher's Note: At *Club Insider*, we wholeheartedly support the wise decision by IHRSA to move the *40th Anniversary Convention and Trade Show* to Dallas Texas, October 13 - 15, 2021. Further, we want to express how important this show is for the entire health and fitness club industry. If you have never been to an IHRSA Show, this is the year to go! For those of us who have been to IHRSA Shows in the past and have been ripped away from each other because of the pandemic, we will reunite soon... at **IHRSA 2021, 40 years strong!**



BOSTON, MA - The *International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association (IHRSA)* has announced that the *40th Annual IHRSA International Convention & Trade Show (IHRSA 2021)* is moving from Los Angeles, California to Dallas, Texas.

For the first time in more than 30 years, the IHRSA International Convention & Trade Show heads to Dallas, from **October 13 - 15, 2021.**

The shift from Los Angeles to Dallas is to ensure that IHRSA members, industry partners, federations and atten-

dees from around the world will be able to safely gather to celebrate the fitness industry's revival at IHRSA 2021.

"Because of the current COVID-19 restrictions in Los Angeles County, hosting IHRSA 2021 in Los Angeles this September as previously planned is too uncertain," said **Brent Darden**, *IHRSA Interim President and CEO*. "The *IHRSA Board of Directors, Industry Partner Advisory Council* and

IHRSA Staff unanimously agreed that moving the Convention to Dallas was the best path forward for our industry and attendees."

Alan Leach, *CEO of the West Wood Clubs* in Dublin, Ireland, and Chair-elect of the IHRSA Board of Directors, feels confident about the move. "Not only is Dallas an exciting new venue to host the IHRSA International Convention & Trade

Show, the October 13 - 15 dates allow a few more crucial weeks for those who may need the extra time to get the vaccine or appropriate approvals in order to travel," said Leach.

IHRSA 2021, the premier annual gathering for the global fitness industry is expected to be the first in-person gathering of its kind for the industry since the pandemic. Attendees can look forward to hearing from keynote speakers, attending educational sessions and experiencing a first-hand look at new innovations, products, and services for the fitness industry.

"I think it was a wonderful decision to move the show to Dallas," said **Emmett Williams**, *CEO (Asia-Pacific) and Partner of Myzone* and *Member of the IHRSA Industry Partner Advisory Council*. "[I] provides certainty that the event will go ahead [and] helps vendors plan resources and operators book their schedule. We all win if we are all at IHRSA, swapping notes and gearing up for the comeback."

The updated *IHRSA 2021 Exhibitor Prospectus* is now available, and IHRSA will release more details for IHRSA 2021 as they are finalized. For updates, visit ihrsa.org/convention.



The Harsh Lessons of Failure... and Why They Matter to You

By: **Thomas Plummer**

The year 2020 is littered with the failure of too many gyms now gone... And, the sad thing is many of those closures could have been avoided and many of those businesses saved if the owners had clung to a few basic concepts. Gyms are emotional businesses. We get close to our clients, live the lifestyle ourselves and quietly believe what we do matters to those we help. But, this emotion also deceives us into thinking we are different than other businesses and that we are entitled to play by a different set of rules. We are wrong.

Gyms are businesses, and these businesses live and fail by the rules that govern all small business concerns. But, because this gym is our dream, created and loved by us, we come to believe these rules of business are for drycleaners and flower shops and have nothing to do with what we own. Even the huge fitness concerns, with multiple units and investment money, fall prey to this emotional trap. We stop innovating and adjusting. We then hang on to the past and fail to realize what made us successful is the very thing that is killing us today. The client changes, the market changes, the tech changes. Yet, we cling to business systems from a decade earlier, which in the fitness world is a hundred light years in the past.

Change comes whether we want it to or not and often from unexpected sources. Pressure, an element of change, is a mysterious force of nature. When pressure is applied, it can turn a skyscraper into a heap of rubble on the ground, yet if applied long enough, it can also turn a piece of coal into a diamond. Pressure, especially like that we all encountered in 2020, revealed the cracks not only in our businesses but in ourselves as well.

Many small businesses can hang on for years, barely making it but making it, nevertheless. The owners work long weeks, take out enough money to start a family, buy a decent car and maybe a home of their own. The business isn't financially strong, but the owners make it work out of the sheer force of their personal strength and belief in what they are doing. It isn't a solid business, but it is a sustainable one as long as the owner doesn't break or ever want more than a week of vacation a year.

The bigger players are like this, too. They limp along year-after-year; raise a new round of investment money; fire the CEO of the week, blaming him for every mistake; and maybe even close a few units to look like we are taking control. These businesses are sustainable as long as nothing big changes in their environment, but when pressure arrives, the cracks appear.

Many fitness businesses, such

as team circuit training and several of the big chains, were either already fading or in trouble before 2020. The virus, the pressure applied in this case, revealed the weaknesses and accelerated the downturn path of these businesses.

Five Mistakes

Here are five mistakes owners made going into 2020. As always, hope for the best for your business, but plan for the worst day of your business life. Learning from these mistakes will keep you safer in the future, and you must assume the pressure will keep on coming for years ahead as all of us in the fitness business have to adjust to a new reality and changing client:

1. Too much dependency on just one product/single methodology.

It did not matter if you were a training gym or big box, if you only had one product to sell, you were hammered in 2020. The circuit team gyms, again already mired in price wars started in 2019 as numerous new imitators entered the arena, were particularly hurt last year. It's hard to sell the idea that thirty people standing shoulder-to-shoulder, sharing breathing space and sweat, is the way to train during a pandemic.

Since the circuit was the only product, there was no retreat. The training gyms, which had small group training and one-on-one, along with a team concept, had a much higher survival rate because it was easier to pivot away to products that still produced high revenue in lockdowns. Imitators, through the form of competitors, usually only attempt to steal one part of your business. If you have a successful business, built upon different layers of offerings targeted toward different consumers, you have a chance to fight back when the wars begin.

The big lessons of this still apply to a virus-free business environment. If you only have one product, you are always susceptible to price wars. If your gym is circuit only, and the guy down the street is doing the same thing, but for \$40 less a month, you are in a price war whether you want to be or not.

The bigger players suffered from the same meltdown. If your primary product is just a simple membership level at one price, you were hurt because single methodology always, and *I stress always*, is dependent on volume sales and not a return-per-client. This means that, either the competition drains you or you burn up your own immediate market since everyone who wants a membership at that price and who lives within three miles of your gym

has purchased one.

Some of the bigger players believe they are beyond this since they offer programming such as one-on-one training, but the reality is that most of the chains have less than 7% of their clients doing any type of higher revenue generation.

In a pandemic, if you need volume to succeed, instead of return per client served, you again die from a slow starvation of leads and sales since you are too dependent on only one demographic in the market. Remember, about 85% of your clients live within three miles of your business. Why only appeal to a limited number of them by only offering one target specific offering, such as team circuit, that we know primarily attracts the 24 - 35 year-old market?

2. Sessions, packages and month-to-month clients killed a lot of gyms.

The gyms still in business used twelve-month contracts as their primary tool. The ones that failed still used tech from last century, including selling sessions, packages and month-to-month memberships.

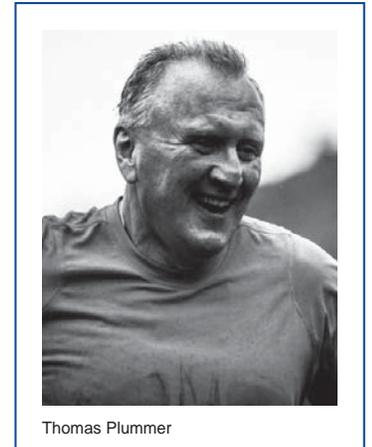
What this translates into is the gyms with a strong receivable base, and managed it ethically through the pandemic, kept an income stream intact, while the others who sold simple usage memberships, such as sessions or putting every client on a month-to-month plan, lost most of their paying clients the first few months of the dark days of March through May last year.

Members obligated to the gym, through a contract, give the gym stability and the ability to project the gym ahead into the future. *I would classify that not using contracts, and therefore not creating a receivable base, is one of the biggest mistakes any gym owner makes*, and this mistake took down a lot of good gyms last year.

3. No reserve capital.

It takes discipline to run a good gym business. You have to have the ability to plan for a time when all hell comes walking through your gym on a Friday afternoon (*think March 13, 2020*). One of the planning tools is creating a reserve capital of at least three months of your normal business expenses as a minimum, with at least six months reserve as the eventual target.

Stuff goes wrong. You get sick, a kid gets sick, a virus hits, you get divorced or a hundred other mind numbing, soul wrenching things can happen to you. Reserve capital gives you time to fight back. Most of the gyms that failed, and



Thomas Plummer

most of the large chains, had less than a month's operating reserve available going into the first lockdown.

You can't fight without cash. You need the discipline to save enough cash, then leave it alone to give your business a chance to live when others die. If you don't have the cash and are still in business, try to create three months of reserves in the next eighteen months of operation. Then, extend it to six months over the following three years after that first saving spree.

This advice also applies to the larger players, but it would have to be modified. If you have a hundred gyms, you do not need three months reserve per gym, but you would benefit with 40% coverage, meaning you sustain at all times a reserve totaling the total operational expense of three months for forty of your gyms in this example. Yes, it seems like a stupidly high number; yet, how many chains filed bankruptcy because three months sitting dark killed their reserve capital?

4. You have to have more than one source of income.

Many owners used online coaching as a tool to survive, then abandoned it when they got back into the daily operation... This was a mistake. Online training should be part of your business plan forever, no matter if you are a single unit or a chain.

Besides supplying additional income, online coaching can extend your brand beyond the boundaries of a brick-and-mortar operation. This online component should be treated as a separate business, with separate statements and a derivative name of your current business and run as a stand-alone.

You should also look at nutrition as a separate business within a business. Many gyms offer nutritional guidance, but few understand the power of running it as
 (See **Thomas Plummer Page 17**)

Why COVID Has Made Fitness Center Design More Important Than Ever

By: **Bruce Carter**

COVID closed clubs. People stayed at home to exercise. Virtual fitness became the new normal. Outdoor fitness, weather permitting, gained in popularity.

Now, clubs are getting back to normal operating conditions, but this will vary according to the state in which the clubs are operating. Studies show that a certain percentage of people will not come back, preferring to continue their in-home or outdoor routine. Has COVID made exercising at home a main competitor of clubs? Sure, many fit people will do both, but what about the rest? Most people will be choosing one over the other.

One of the absolutely best ways for clubs to regain their strength is to make their environments and the experience of visiting a club dramatically better than the home exercising experience. This is why fitness center interior design --the elements of space, lines, shape, pattern, light, color and texture-- need to be better than ever. Creative design affects human behavior, as well as emotional and physical health. It enhances the human experience and improves a customer's overall wellbeing, thereby building brand recognition and improving business performance. Your club's experience should be something they cannot get anywhere else.

As we are all aware, the experience of using a health club took a big negative hit during COVID; health clubs were not "healthy." People coming back into clubs, or going to a club for the first time, will still have this image ingrained in their minds. Yet, even without COVID, so many people have conflicting emotions about being in

a club. They know they should exercise but hate the discomfort and anxiety of being there. This is one of the reasons so many jumped all over gyms during COVID, saying such things as, "gyms were never really needed in the first place." Therefore, welcoming people into a club will need to be more inviting and less intimidating than ever. The term "gymtimadation" is the fear of working out in front of others. To many in the industry, it is hard to understand just how "real" this is, and COVID added another level of fear.

So, what can be done to make people feel more comfortable? Start with the experience of walking through the front door. Lobby design should be more of a separated space from the rest of the club and its workout areas. Ease people into it. Let the lobby be a "softer" experience with materials, finishes and lighting that warmly welcomes an individual, as well as leaves a positive image in people's minds when they leave. If you have items to sell in the lobby, have them off to the side and professionally displayed, not one of the first things people see when they enter. You are there to help them, not sell them something.

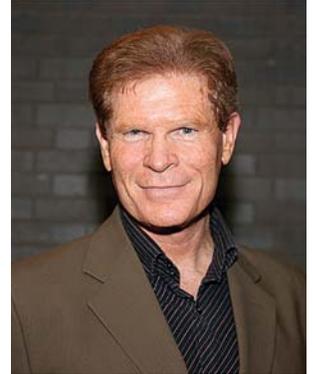
Try this for welcoming people to your club even before they enter. If possible, add music outdoors in the parking lot or upon entering. Uplifting and energetic music will do wonders. With personal listening devices, many clubs have eliminated music to workout areas. It is recommended to consider adding it back to the environment, adding "energy" to the space. Keep in mind, one thing exercising at home cannot do is "add energy," which comes from an exciting environment with like-minded people wanting to improve

their lives.

People went to the outdoors during COVID. It was safer and made people feel healthier; therefore, one of the design features that will gain more strength after COVID is biophilia. This is the human tendency to interact or be closely associated with nature. Research shows that it can reduce stress, enhance clarity of thought, improve our wellbeing and expedite healing... all perfect goals for a club. One of the ways that this will grow more popular with clubs is to provide platescapes and plant walls, beautiful areas dedicated to nature such as in a lobby or a main feature in an exercise area. Consider a 10' x 10' "garden" of different size and shapes of plants. Most people would love to have more nature in their lives, so let a club be somewhere special they can get this; the investment of space and dollars will be worth it. The key, however, is to have a professional create and maintain the area.

COVID kept many people out of locker rooms, only using bathrooms if needed. Once again, a soft welcoming of materials, finishes and lighting can only improve a person's experience in a club. It is recommended to add soothing music to the environment. And, note that TVs (depending on what's on) can change the vibe of a locker room from uplifting to downward.

Increased TV ads during COVID showed people at home on cardio watching beautiful scenery on an equipment monitor or looking out the window to the ocean or mountains. Post-COVID club design should allow for video walls of multiple TVs connected together to provide separate



Bruce Carter

screens or one large screen. Seeing a sports event or beautiful nature scene (there are wonderful options for this on [Shutterstock.com/footage](https://www.shutterstock.com/footage)) on a 10' x 10' screen is a "wow" experience people will not get anywhere else. Also, as many have come to realize, news and opinionated shows should be avoided, keeping content uplifting and entertaining.

Club environments are also taking on a new role as a result of COVID, that of being a "stage" for virtual fitness programming. Whatever virtual fitness is created, the space it is filmed in has to be extra special. It needs to be dramatic with lighting, sound, angles, finishes and architectural features. Whether its Zumba, boot camp or yoga, people should be "transported" to a world of ultimate exercise experience.

Because of COVID, all clubs
(See **Bruce Carter** Page 19)

...Thomas Plummer

continued from page 16

a business that can stand separately. The client is looking for leadership in today's fitness world, and accountability through guided nutrition is a great way to deliver it.

5. Ego took down a lot of owners... and will take down more before we are through with this.

Angry owners mostly lost their gyms. When you spend all your time fighting with the city and state, you fail to serve the client. I don't care about your politics; I do care that you stay in business. As I said earlier, this is an emotional business. Stating a fact here, not an opinion, that many gym owners who decided to not wear masks or insist their clients to wear them reopened at about 40% of their membership. Yes, they kept that handful of clients happy who also refused to wear masks, but they also kept about 50% of the rest of their clients out of their gym, and many may never return.

Owners cited this as a personal choice, and that's their right. I agree it is their right, and I respect that right. But, as a client, if I do not believe you are keeping me safe, then I will stop paying you. Yes, gyms are safe places, and the data backed this up as the year progressed... but you *telling me* is not the same as you *giving me* leadership and *proving* you are trying to keep me safe. Every owner has the right to run his business as he sees fit, but when the business fails, you have to question your own decisions and not blame others because your plan was a failure.

Angry owners make bad decisions. Owners who spent all their time ranting against a system that does not bend often failed last year. Owners who worked to prove they were willing to do what is necessary to keep clients safe came through it with much of their membership intact. Again, it's your choice, and I respect your choice; I am just here to tell you how it all turned out. If your life is your business, then put the business above your emotions.

What does this all mean?

The fitness industry got reset last year. Pressure was applied and many of us broke. The business model we have used for decades proved to have some severe cracks in it, and the pressure of 2020 revealed those cracks, resulting in failure. I anticipated at least 30% of all gyms would fail, and if we include the chain closures, along with the small studios, I think we probably exceeded that number.

There are always good times in the industry, along with the dark days. I anticipate that May of this year through May of 2022 to be perhaps the best run in the modern history of fitness; yet, many owners are not ready. Too many are clinging to the idea that 2019 is coming back. Many consultants are trying to teach us to get back to the basics of that era. Many investment groups keep spending money on business concepts that were dying prior to the pandemic. I believe they are taking us down a bad path.

So, what's the secret? *Let go of*

what was, understand what your current reality is and embrace what the future of the industry can be if you change and adapt. Learn from the mistakes that took down so many gyms. This is a business no matter what your emotion tells you. Run it that way, and there will be good days ahead.

(Thomas Plummer has been one of the primary thought leaders in the fitness industry for over 40 years. His approach of change through leadership, delivered in the 1,100+ workshops he has taught all around the world since 1980, has resulted in the creation of many of the current business concepts now in use in the industry, such as the modern training gym business model and layered pricing structure used by so many financially successful fitness businesses. He is perhaps best known for helping young fitness professionals understand and master the business side of the gym business, and his "no nonsense" speaking style has kept him as one of the most popular speakers in the world of fitness year after year. You can contact Thom at info@thomasplummer.com.)

An Industry Opportunity: Programming to Help COVID Survivors Recover

By: **Bonnie Patrick-Mattalian**

I don't need to remind you of the sobering statistics. Yet, as of this writing, April 15, 2021, here they are regarding COVID-19 per *Johns Hopkins University of Medicine*:

■ **31.4 million cases** and **565,000 deaths** in the United States;
■ **138 million cases** globally with almost **3 million deaths**.

A tragedy by any means. Doing the math, however, if there is any shred of positive news, it is that more than 135 million people around the world have recovered.

Those recovering may have suffered damage to the heart, lungs, brain, kidneys and other organs. Scarring of the lungs, an enlarged heart, tachycardia and fluid around the lungs and heart continue to be problematic for many.

According to the *Harvard Medical School Harvard Health Letter*, one in ten COVID survivors are "COVID Long-Haulers," meaning three months after the initial infection, they have not fully recovered even after the virus has been abated. They are struggling with lingering effects, and these symptoms and effects may continue for a year or more.

There are 98 known symptoms for persons still struggling with the after-effects of the virus. Based on a recent survey, the most prevalent of these are:

- **100%** - Fatigue;
- **66.8%** - Muscle or body aches;
- **65.1%** - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing;
- **59%** - Difficulty concentrating or focusing;
- **58.5%** - Inability to exercise or be active;
- **57.6%** - Headache;
- **49.9%** - Difficulty sleeping;
- **47.6%** - Anxiety;
- **45.6%** - Memory problems;
- **41.9%** - Dizziness.

Of note is the fact that exertion of any kind, whether physical or emotional, may cause a relapse and/or extreme fatigue.

Science and medicine are still catching up on how to address these ongoing issues. I know because, in December, my husband and I became gravely ill and hospitalized with COVID. I landed in a COVID ward with the disease and associated illnesses. That week and the month that followed was terrifying for our families and us. We were among the lucky ones; we survived.

It has been an interesting journey since then. As I started to feel better in February, I told my doctors I wanted to start moving again. I asked what the parameters were for exercise. Their response was very arbitrary, including, "Go ahead, but it will be hard. Just don't do much; take it really easy." The exercise physiologist in me was not satisfied with that response.

So, I joined multiple national COVID survivor support groups to see

what I could learn. I knew that getting moving again would help with many of the symptoms, and I would recover more quickly. And, there were hundreds of thousands of people like me craving information on holistic therapies for our symptoms.

Clinics with a focus on providing medical care for COVID long-haul syndrome sufferers are available in most states. There are long waits in many cases for appointments, and they require insurance coverage or direct payments.

Just recently, *Johns Hopkins Medicine* came out with guidelines for COVID survivors looking to begin moving again: bit.ly/clubinsider127.

The good news for me is I have now resumed my previous activity levels. I know my limitations and watch my heart rate and pulse oximeter.

The Opportunity For Our Industry

The virus has impacted a portion of every community. Depending upon where your site is located, .5 - 12% or more of your community's population may have contracted COVID. And, there may be another 1 - 5%+ who had the virus but either didn't know it or didn't get tested.

We've re-opened our sites. As you continue to re-open yours, any of the following may be true for your members and community:

GROUP A: A percentage of your members may have contracted the virus, and they



Bonnie Patrick-Mattalian

are coming back in to begin moving again. They may have underlying conditions that are new and undetected since acquiring COVID.

GROUP B: A percentage of your members may have contracted the virus and canceled or frozen their accounts as they struggle with symptoms.

GROUP C: A percentage of the population in your community may have contracted the virus. Although they may never have exercised before, they are looking for relief from their symptoms.

GROUP D: A percentage of your population has not exercised before. In the past, typically, this has been 80% of the population. Now, this group looks at wellness and a healthy lifestyle to be more critical than in years past. They are looking for a wellness authority in their community to support a healthy lifestyle.

For **GROUPS A, B and C**, it makes sense to relook at our intake processes to ensure it is safe to begin exercising or resume movement. This helps to mitigate risk for the member and your facility.

For **GROUPS A and B**, while they are already members, this is an opportunity to relook at their health status via a questionnaire and a conversation with a fitness professional.

Once the physician clearance is received, the best solution is to provide 1:1 or small group programs for **GROUPS A, B, and C**.

I decided to look around our industry to see what changes sites were making towards these accommodations for people recovering from COVID. Many organizations chose not to comment. However, here are some highlights from centers that are monitoring these needs in their communities:

(See *Bonnie Patrick-Mattalian* Page 19)

Pride and Discipline: The Legacy of Jack LaLanne

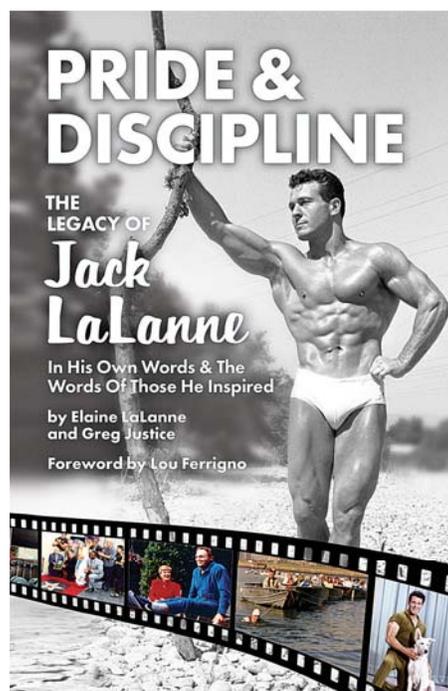
Coming Spring of 2021, *Pride and Discipline: The Legacy of Jack LaLanne*, was put together by National Fitness Hall of Fame Inductees, **Elaine LaLanne** (NFHOF 2017) and **Greg Justice** (NFHOF 2017).

This is a book nearly 100 years in the making, and it includes some never seen before material by Jack LaLanne, along with a timeline of Jack's life. To say these pages are full of motivation, inspiration and life-changing material is an understatement, and we're so excited to share it with the world.

Pride and Discipline: The Legacy of Jack LaLanne was compiled as a tribute to the *Godfather of Fitness*, and to introduce an entirely new generation to his life and legacy.

For Club Insider Readers Only: Pre-Order Your Copy and receive a copy of "You Are An Architect" (A never seen before column written by Jack LaLanne).

Pre-Order Today
bit.ly/pridediscipline



...Bonnie Patrick-Mattalian

continued from page 18

Cooper Wellness Strategies

Predictably, the world-renowned *Cooper Aerobics* has developed processes to improve the quality of life for COVID survivors. Cooper Wellness Strategies provides programming solutions for medically-directed fitness centers around the country. And, they have several solutions for exercisers suffering from post-COVID syndrome.

According to *Cooper Wellness Strategies Program Director, Sheryl Brown, PT, MSPT*, as part of their *Cooper Tracks* exercise and education programs, their *Immunity and Reconditioning Track* orientation process is individualized and provides 1:1 support. The intake process includes medical clearance/medical history review and a comprehensive health assessment before beginning the eight-week group program. "Key to following the principle of *Exercise is Medicine*, the participant's signs, symptoms and vital signs should be monitored while exercising in the program," explains Brown. The trainer should monitor fatigue, shortness of breath and rate of perceived exertion (RPE), before and during exercise.

Nutritional education, stress management and social support are provided. Brown comments, "Our program emphasizes breathing retraining, which helps decrease shortness of breath and improve the efficiency of respiratory musculature during exercise and activities of daily living. Mindful relaxation exercises are performed at the end of each exercise session to help the body recover from exertion, reduce muscle tension, lower blood pressure and heart rate and may even contribute to improving quality of sleep."

For additional information on *Cooper Tracks*, contact **Sheryl Brown** at sbrown@cooperwellness.com.

Valley Health

Valley Health in Virginia is a 60,000 square-foot facility certified through the *Medical Fitness Association (MFA)* and managed by *Power Wellness*.

Jeffrey Jeran, MS, CSCS, FMHA is the *Corporate Director of Fitness Services Valley Health* and is also the *Chair-Elect* for the *MFA*.

Jeran states, "Our *Next Steps Program* provides the direction and support people who are recovering from COVID need." Next Steps is typically an eight-week program open to the public, including two supervised sessions per week plus nutritional guidance. There are ten different programs available based on chronic condition prevalence and need.

The positive outcomes from this program include a very high transition rate to membership. "Our Next Steps Program graduates that became members also stay engaged with us as members on average for one year longer," Jeran explained.

For additional information on *Valley Health's* programs, contact **Jeffrey Jeran** at jjeran@valleyhealthlink.net.

DeWitt Physical Therapy and Wellness

Dr. Jeanette M. De Witt PT, DPT, LAT, ATC, NASM-CPT, NASM - FNS, Certified Precision Neuromuscular Therapist, is the *Owner of DeWitt Physical Therapy and Wellness*, offering in-person and telehealth physical therapy and personal training.

This center utilizes a holistic, science-based whole-body approach to healing for special conditions. As a physical therapist, Dr. DeWitt explains, "We are conservative in our approach, and we develop criteria for each individual to move through each step in programming as we monitor their vital signs closely."

Their philosophy and programming follow the route of "Recover, Restore, Revitalize." For COVID patients, the team focuses on diaphragmatic breathing and exercises to open the chest wall. Many patients also utilize essential oils and nutritional services as warranted for condition-based solutions. And, DeWitt has a vibrant Facebook community, helping families achieving optimal health together.

For more information on *DeWitt Physical Therapy and Wellness*, contact **Jeanette M. De Witt** at jeanette@dewittptwellness.com.

Piedmont Atlanta Fitness Center

Joshua J. Lee, PT, DPT, is a *Doctor of Physical Therapy at Piedmont Atlanta Outpatient Rehabilitative Services*. **Paige N. Jones III, ACSM CEP, EIM3**, is the *Manager of the acclaimed Piedmont Atlanta Fitness Center*.

The physical therapy department works in conjunction with the *Georgia Lung Clinic* to begin rehabilitation with patients who have had COVID-19 or are recovering from COVID-19.

Lee explained, "Regarding standard parameters and guidelines for COVID-19, unfortunately, due to its extremely variable presentation and the lack of data on each of the presentations (anosmia to dysphagia/gastrointestinal to renal), we have been doing it on a case-by-case basis so far to ensure safety. We have found that some people do well with just walking and moderate exercise, while others may need to start with simply learning to stand and be okay with standing without fatigue. Some have balance issues; others do not." He continued, "Without careful medical clearance (ruling out major cardiovascular/pulmonary/GI/renal systems) and assessment, it could be quite dangerous to give a general exercise protocol or even guidelines without knowing the full history and new presentation post-COVID."

Many COVID survivors have complained of extreme fatigue with exercise. Lee attributes that to oxygen obstruction, GI issues or possible sympathetic nervous system overdrive. He reminds us that it is essential that each person heal at their rate and to know that this may take months or more.

Lee reminds us that there may be a need for counseling for the COVID survivor also. And, he asks, "Please be

patient and kind with your providers as we are also struggling with the vast unknowns and cannot give specific answers but are working very diligently to better grasp an idea of how to move forward and help our patients/clients the best we can."

For further information on *Piedmont Outpatient Services*, please contact **Joshua J. Lee** at josh.lee@piedmont.org or **Paige N. Jones III** at paige.jones@piedmont.org.

Additional program and platform solutions that can be integrated into fitness center operations include:

■ **Genavix HealthyCare** - Enabling individuals and families to early detect, reduce or eliminate elevated or chronic risk factors through lifestyle change. Industry veteran, **Mike Benton**, leads this program.

■ **Avidon Health** - A health platform that combines human connection with data-driven technology that produces outcomes and changes lives. Avidon is an enablement product created by industry and health promotion knowledge leaders that engages populations.

■ **Stasis Performance Breathwork** - This is a comprehensive, medically-based program to improve lung capacity through structured deep breathing exercises. Developed by **Josh Duntz**, a former member of *Navy Special Operations teams*, the program also helps to reduce stress and improve mental health.

Through a significant amount of research on COVID impacts and solutions, I support centers to clarify the current market demand and create differentiated programs and services according to what is important to consumers now. For example, program opportunities for our sites to support both COVID survivors and the public at large include:

■ **Salt Rooms** - Halotherapy is an evolving field not yet scientifically proven. Anecdotaly, participants have reported improvements in breathing and stress reduction. Medical professionals should manage such a program.

...Bruce Carter

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should have a *Medical Exercise Monitor (MEM)*. During COVID, clubs were portrayed to be part of the problem, not part of the solution. Those in the industry know the powerful medical benefits of exercise, but this was lost to the medical community and general population. Therefore, all clubs should have a monitor in a beautifully displayed area than continually provides scientific information on the medical benefits of exercise. This message should be ongoing. Never again should health clubs be so wrongfully accused.

Many people need to get a new positive mental attitude about clubs. Even

■ **Facilitated and Assistive Stretch Sessions** - When performed by a trained professional, assisted stretching will help to reduce fatigue and stress.

■ **Infrared Saunas** - Yes, they are back. They can help with sleep, stress and fatigue. Participants need to stay hydrated during these sessions and after.

■ **Sleep and Stress-Reducing Therapeutic Programs** - Aromatherapy, Blue Light Glasses, Meditation, Hydromassage and Massage focusing on the vagus nerve are increasing in popularity at many centers.

■ **Nutritional Coaching, Cooking Classes** - Food can be used for healing. We need direction in order to change our mindset accordingly. Partner with a local restaurant for cooking classes at their location, a community win/win.

■ **Individualized Membership Options** - A one-size-fits-all membership option approach may not be sustainable. Give your community the option to create their membership plan. Those who are just beginning on a new, healthy journey --that 80% of the population who never exercised previously-- will be attracted to individualized lifestyle solutions.

Someone recently asked me if it even made sense to focus on COVID survivors or the virus at all. They explained that the pandemic was almost over as far as they could see. A few thoughts on this pertinent question. The following statistics are specific to the United States:

■ As of the week this article's authorship, COVID accounts for 912 deaths and 70,000 - 80,000 cases per day. Cases and hospitalizations have increased by 7%.

■ The segment of our population that COVID has impacted needs our help and support, and the relationship we build with them now will likely extend for years to come.

■ Experts report this is not the last pandemic or the last wave of this virus or mutations (See *Bonnie Patrick-Mattalian Page 20*)

before COVID, so many people held such a negative attitude, and many in the industry would be shocked to believe this. COVID shined the light. When a person is in a club, let that be a uniquely inspiring and memorable experience. COVID was a "game changer," yet because of COVID, clubs will become greater "game changers" in people's lives. A health club should be a place, a very special place, like no other where people can "escape" to and uplift their physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing.

(*Bruce Carter is the owner of Optimal Design Systems, International. Bruce can be reached at bruce@optimaldsi.com.)*

Is the Fitness Club Industry Dead?

By: **Matt Zagrodzky**

In the beginning of the COVID catastrophe, it sure seemed that way. But, now that the restrictions are being lifted, there are definitely signs that the fitness club industry is the *Phoenix* rising from the ashes and moving on to greatness. Or is it?

Recently, I had the opportunity to sit in (virtually) on an interview with **John**

Foley, CEO of Peloton. An amazing guy with an amazing company. He spoke about a range of topics, but the one that made me sit up and take notice was the vision he has for his company.

Currently, they have about two million subscribers. His goal is 100 million subscribers. And, after hearing him speak, I have no doubt Peloton will get there. When asked about the impact this would have on

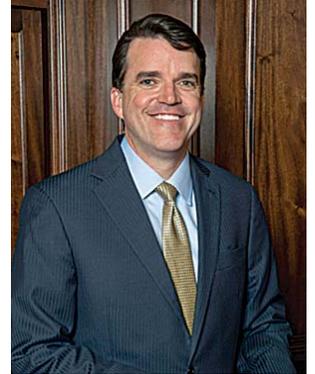
the fitness industry, he thought that, over time, the impact on fitness clubs would be substantial and that it was probably an industry that would continue its decline. Bold words. But, is it true?

The Peloton platform offers amazing content with all kinds of options to customize your workout. And, I'm sure they are tracking usage data, as well as have a good idea of the trends for continued growth and client demographics.

One thing the Peloton experience cannot deliver, however, is the benefits an in-person experience delivers. Even Mr. Foley admitted it when he spoke of the Peloton headquarters. He emphasized the importance of having a gorgeous building, snacks and refreshments for employees, and the energy the in-person office environment can create. Sound familiar?

Great fitness clubs deliver an experience that cannot be captured on a treadmill and a TV monitor at home. A smile or hug to greet your members when they walk in the door. Sweating with other members working on the same goals you are. Sharing a drink, smoothie or protein bar with your friends before heading home (or a beer if your club has a bar). And, the high-five on the way out the door for a job well done. The energy of an in-person experience at your fitness club simply cannot be replaced.

As I said, I think Peloton will hit their 100 million subscriber goal, but it won't be at the expense of the fitness club industry. It reminds me of when **Gary Heavin** shook up the fitness world with *Curves*. The *Curves* concept did not take away from other fitness centers. It created



Matt Zagrodzky

fitness interest in a whole new segment of the population that simply did not go to a gym. Peloton will likely do the same thing: inspire more people to exercise that did not typically go to a gym.

Sure, some fitness club members may drop their membership and get a Peloton. But, I believe that they will be back because, now more than ever, people want (and need) the personal connection your fitness center delivers.

(Matt Zagrodzky is Vice President and Co-Owner of iGo Figure Software. Founded in 1997, iGo Figure has helped fitness centers service tens of millions of members in 63 countries around the world. To find more about how iGo Figure can help you manage your club, develop relationships with your members and achieve exponential growth, visit www.igofigure.com.)

...Bonnie Patrick-Mattalian

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that we will see.

So, while we focus on adjusting our operating models and programs, establishing our centers as the "go-to" in the community for all health-related items will be an integral part of our success moving forward. We will include virtual programs and engagement options likely for the next few years.

As industry champion **Dr. Amy Bantham** explained to me, this pandemic is actually the kick-in-the-pants our industry needed. We are rethinking our offerings and refocusing the experience with the customers driving decisions. That's precisely the way strong businesses thrive.

During this reset, we have the opportunity to become an essential part of the community through education, messaging, programming and creating

relationships with new segments of the market.

By re-establishing ourselves as the health promotion authority for our local community's needs, we will provide solutions and build stronger relationships that will weather any storm.

(Bonnie Patrick-Mattalian builds high-performance teams and businesses in both the private and not-for-profit sectors in the fitness and wellness industries. She is renowned for understanding fitness consumer insights and behaviors, having facilitated the successful launch of over 60 centers and turnarounds for another 20 locations throughout her career, including many of the industry's top producing brands. Recently, she has served on IHRSA's Membership Headlight Committee. You can contact Bonnie at bmattalian@gmail.com and www.linkedin.com/in/bonniepatrickmattalian.)



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When club leaders support organized court programming, they also seize the opportunity to use their courts as a competitive advantage in creating a "third place" culture* at their club, i.e., a place beyond home and work that feels like *Cheers* (where everybody knows your name!).

*See *Celebrating the Third Place - Inspiring Stories about the "Great Good Places" at the Heart of Our Communities* by Ray Oldenburg

This article seeks to remind club owners and managers how grateful we are that you make racquetball and handball (etc.) possible. Lives are enhanced at your club every day, year after year.

Each of our organizations reached out to players to ask for their thoughts on their "third place," the clubs where they have been members for many years. We received more responses than this article could accommodate, and we will be sure to include them all in their entirety on our websites.

Racquetball

Barry Dixon - Glass Court, Lombard, IL (25 years): "My time as a member at Glass Court has been filled with countless fond memories. I have created lasting friendships, I have caught up with old friends from my college days, and I continue to create new friendships each and every day. One of the best parts of my memories is that three generations of my

family (including my dad, my son and me) have played racquetball at Glass Court."

Doug Jenkins - Sportsclub, Greenville, S.C. (20 years): "Racquetball has been in my life for over 40 years now, something I love to do as much today as back when I started. As long as the club has courts, you can count on me to be a member."

David Stob - Olympic Athletic Club, Seattle, WA (17 years): "Racquetball is my 'third place' and has been since 1982. In my little two-court club, there are at least five distinct pods of players who treat the club as their 'third place.' I call them the Senior/Masters group, the Technology Workers, the Professional Women, the Young Families, and the Diehards. The reason these players choose one facility over another is because of social groups. Just like a Zumba class creates relationships, so does racquetball."

Kevin Sendrey - LA Fitness, Dallas/Fort Worth, TX (16 years): "I spend 5 - 6 days a week at LA Fitness where I enjoy hanging out with my second family: the racquetball crew! My son has also found the love of racquetball and plays up there with us every day. I literally don't know what I would do with my evenings without the courts!"

Amy Pivovar - Genesis, Omaha, NE (6 years): "There is really no end to friendship opportunities. When I returned to racquetball in 2015, I was re-introduced to many of the old players, and I soon

weaseled my way into the group that I am in now. Racquetball is just one of those sports where it's so inclusive of everyone. I can't imagine not playing... ever!"

Handball

Gary Cruz - Los Caballeros, Fountain Valley, CA (35 years) and Los Angeles Athletic Club, Los Angeles, CA (14 years): "Since handball is a lifetime sport, I gravitated to health clubs that had courts. With those courts came a connection to a community of similar people. I've maintained a health club membership all my life, and it not surprising that, as a result, I maintained friendships with all the other players who have been members for just as long. We owe a debt of gratitude to the health clubs that have helped us sustain a healthy lifestyle and sense of community for so many years."

Thomas H. Byer - Los Caballeros Racquet and Sport, Fountain Valley, CA (13 years): "I stopped playing handball in 1985 when courts were eliminated where I lived. Years later, I returned to handball and play 3 - 4 times a week. In those years away from handball, my health deteriorated with weight gain and more. I need this game in my life."

Ashley Moler - Tucson Racquet Club, Tucson, AZ (12 years): "The Tucson Racquet Club has really been an integral part of our family. I became a member in 2009 and have met some of my lifelong friends there who I now consider my family.

We are very lucky to have the Tucson Racquet Club and look forward to many more years and memories made there."

Conclusion

How can we reach a place where clubs realize how much their members appreciate what they bring... where the members are inspired to devote some time to helping the clubs be more successful... where the "third place" that the clubs provide becomes something very special in the equation of profitability... and where retaining long-term members as well as gaining new members is achieved via the warm atmosphere of friendship and acceptance fostered by the clubs and sustained via the "third place" family?

These aren't easy times, and we all need each other more than ever. Club owners/managers... players... members... please reach out to each other to see what assistance can be arranged. It will look a little different everywhere, and we would love to hear about your successes!

Returning Members + New Members = Increased Profit = Keeping Courts = Win/Win!

We're excited about our next article that will suggest *all sorts of ways* courts can be kept busy and profitable. Please visit bit.ly/clubinsider124 for court programming resources and materials. Visit ushandball.org for information on how to get free equipment, instructional resources, and more for your club from the *First Ace Development Program*.

Live Group Fitness is the Answer... Again.

By: Terry Browning

The pandemic has no doubt altered consumer behavior. But, is this alteration a permanent change or a pandemic-induced adjustment? The "Pandemic Boom" has catapulted many industries and products to stratospheric sales increases, including a 500% increase in bread machine sales and an 800% increase in toilet paper sales. And, the world's largest streaming service, *Netflix*, had record breaking sales for six straight months. Is this the new road forward? Have people now really discovered their love for bread making? Will toilet paper sales continue on this roll? Have we decided to stop doing and just start watching?

We'd suggest, and believe most people agree, this pandemic boom was just a temporary detour. Bread machines aren't flying off the shelves anymore because we can only eat so much sourdough. Toilet paper sales are, well, in the toilet with below pre-pandemic levels. And, *Netflix* reported their slowest quarterly sales to start the year in over four years, and they

anticipate their worst quarterly growth ever in Q2 of 2021. Maybe the memes are true; people really *have* finished watching all of *Netflix*!

Our industry suffered from the pandemic bust, with health club closures at nearly 20% and job loss at over 40%. And, of course, a segment of the fitness industry did experience the pandemic boom... streaming at home workouts. We've all read, heard or maybe even contributed to this 200%, 400% or even 700% growth. Even our *MOSSA On Demand* experienced this type of stunning growth, but we knew this was temporary until clubs reopened. Many now believe, or tout, this is the way of the future. They claim this is more than just a detour. This is the new road forward. But, is it?

Similar to other industries, consumer behavior in fitness was forced to change course. And, like other industries, it's most likely a temporary one. What fueled this streaming workout growth was the shutdown of nearly every health club in the world. In the matter of a few days,

(See *Terry Browning Page 22*)



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WE WANT TO HELP BRING
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...Terry Browning

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nearly 180 million members worldwide, and over 60 million members in the U.S., were scrambling for an at-home alternative. As vaccinations roll-out and health clubs open safely to pre-pandemic offerings, we'll be faced with the same issue we have been trying to figure out since the industry began. That is, for the majority of people, keeping a regular exercise routine was hard to adhere to before the pandemic, it's hard to adhere to during the pandemic, and it will remain hard to adhere to after the pandemic.

Unfortunately, everyone has not suddenly become fitness fanatics like the streaming workout world is telling us. With sweeping lockdowns and limitations, the pandemic is actually making people more sedentary than ever. In fact, a survey by *OnePoll* showed over 60% of respondents said they have a more sedentary lifestyle now as a result of working from home, spending more time on social media and watching entertainment. Not surprisingly, a survey by the *American Psychological Association* reported that 42% of adults in the U.S. reported undesired weight gain due to COVID, resulting in an average increase of 29 pounds.

In addition to physical setbacks, the pandemic has produced alarming increases in loneliness. A recent *University of Miami* study reported 65% of people, aged 18 - 35, had increased feelings of loneliness since the declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic. Scientists have already identified links between loneliness and other psychological issues, and in this study, people who described themselves as feeling lonely also reported experiencing anxiety (76%), a loss of feelings of connectedness (58%) and depression (78%).

So, considering the state of your average returning member or potential new member, it's even more important now how you service them to ensure their, and your, success. To service the fitness fanatic is simple. They have likely already come back. But, to service the member who has fallen out of their routine, gained weight and is possibly suffering from feeling lonely and disconnected, requires more. They need more. They need motivation. They need connection. They need accountability. They need a schedule. They need to be led. And, they need it to be as enjoyable as possible.

High quality, professional, live group fitness was the solution pre-pandemic, and now, considering everything, is even

more the solution. Motivation, connection and community come from the experience of working out with an instructor and with other members. It's always scheduled, and for many, it's a social boost for the week. Further, in a great group fitness experience, the instructor guides them, and combined with motivational and emotive music, can make the experience as enjoyable as exercise can be... hopefully so much so that people put down their remotes, start to spend less time with the screens and more time in your club.

MOSSA educates and supports clubs with a system that has proven to be a tremendous solution to enable a broad audience, from fitness fanatic to new exerciser, to start moving and keep moving. Clubs offering MOSSA programs have reported 200% to 300% increases in participation, servicing on average 38% of all visits in group fitness. For these reasons, group fitness, as we call it, is the stickiest web a club can create to capture and keep members, now more than ever before. Learn more at www.mossa.net. (As President and CEO of MOSSA, formerly known as *The STEP Company*, Terry Browning has been instrumental in guiding the company's directions after the introduction of *The STEP* to the fitness



Terry Browning

industry and retailers, has led the team that introduced *Branded Group Fitness* to health clubs in 1997 and now steers the company's growth in the consumer digital workout market. Terry has nearly 30 years industry experience and holds a degree in Marketing and Business Administration from the University of Akron. Terry can be reached by email at terry@mossa.net or phone at 800-729-7837, Ext. 242.)

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