

Norm Cates'

CLUB INSIDER

CELEBRATING 30+ YEARS OF TRUST

Cover Story Classics: ***Big John McCarthy... One of a Kind!***



OCTOBER 2025

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CLUB INSIDER

CELEBRATING 30+ YEARS OF TRUST

Cover Story Classics: Big John McCarthy... One of a Kind!

By: Norm Cates

Publisher's Note: This *Cover Story Classic* dates back to November 2014 and features a fantastic conversation/interview with "big" **John McCarthy**. His life story, as well as what he has done for our industry, is truly a beautiful one. Following the passing of "Uncle" **Rick Caro**, we felt it pertinent to bring this story back to our readers. Today, *Mr. McCarthy*, as I still call him, is enjoying retirement, but he continues to have his pulse on the industry, as I am fortunate enough to hear from him often, always with kind words. Thank you, Mr. McCarthy! Folks, please read on. As you do, please remember the age of this article. Some things said then are still pertinent today. Other things are not. And, sadly, we have

lost many mentioned in this article, another reason we are bringing it to you again. As the shepherd of our industry's history, we never want it to be forgotten. Thank you for reading.

■ ■ ■

The health and fitness club world is vastly different now than it was in 1981 when the man I affectionately call, "Big John," and describe in the title of this very special *Club Insider Cover Story* as, "One of a Kind," stepped into the role of *IHRSA's Founding Executive Director*.

Big John McCarthy truly had a destiny 34 years ago... At the time, it was an undisclosed destiny that he would someday become known and acknowledged

worldwide as the man who would take *IHRSA* Founder and club business icon, **Rick Caro's** vision for the brand new trade Association to a level of excellence that all of us were only dreaming of at the time when we founded what was then called *IRSA, The International Racquet Sports Association*, (then *IHRSA* and now *HFA*).

As one of the industry icons who has forever changed our industry, Rick Caro will forever be known as "The Founder" of *IHRSA*, and it was this Author's distinct honor and pleasure to be a Co-Founder of the Association along with him and five others in 1981. The other five Co-Founders were: **Dale Dibble**, **Jennifer Wayt Saslaw**, "Brother" **Curt Beusman**, **Todd Pulis** and **Peter Donahue**. As a Team, we sought to
(See *John McCarthy* Page 10)



John McCarthy

Club Studio Brings Top Tier Fitness Without the Luxury Price Tag to Miami Worldcenter

IRVINE, CA - *Fitness International, LLC* announces the opening of its 15th *Club Studio* location, a state-of-the-art fitness destination at the highly visible corner of Miami Worldcenter, one of the largest and most transformative urban developments in the United States.

Located in the heart of Downtown Miami, the all-new 38,000 square-foot flagship facility brings together premium gym amenities, five boutique studio concepts and advanced recovery services, all within a dynamic, cutting-edge environment designed for the modern fitness enthusiast.

"Our corner location at Miami



Worldcenter brings our full concept to life, giving members the complete experience. From 15 locations today, we'll have 50 open nationwide within the next 12 months," said **Nick Roberts**, *Chief Real Estate Officer at Fitness International*. "With over 30 years of operating history in Miami, we understand the transformative impact of the Miami Worldcenter development. Launching our first Florida Club Studio location here feels both natural and exciting."

(See *Club Studio* Page 6)

World Gym Advances Global Growth with Mexico MFA and Australia Expansion

TAIPEI, TAIWAN - *World Gym Corporation* (2762.TW) ("WorldGym" or the "Company"), the owner of the iconic World Gym brand with over 270 locations worldwide, announces significant progress in its global growth initiatives, highlighted by a Master Franchise Agreement (MFA) in Mexico and surging growth across Australia. The MFA will bring a minimum of 30 new World Gym facilities to Mexico while the Company has added five new locations in Australia. World Gym also reported record revenue and continued growth as well as five new corporate-owned locations in Taiwan.

(See *World Gym* Page 6)



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Norm's Notes

■ **Hello Everybody!** This is your **Club Insider Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993** checking in with our **382nd monthly edition of this 30+ year running club business publication** I refer to as: **A Labor of Love!** I'm very thankful that you've tuned in again for this iteration of **Norm's Notes**, as I proceed on my keyboard with my longtime habit of **"Telling-It-Like-It-Is!"** I'm really happy that you're reading this edition, and I want to **THANK YOU ALL** for sticking with us every month! As usual, we have a bunch of health and fitness club business news, **so please read on!**

■ **Is AMERICA a GREAT COUNTRY, or WHAT!? Hmmm... hmmm... hmmm!** And, as usual, let me start these **Norm's Notes** with my normal monthly salutation to you all: **GOD BLESS AMERICA and GOD BLESS YOU, YOUR FAMILY and YOUR BUSINESS!!!**

■ **Hooray and Congratulations** to the **Crunch Fitness** folks, as their fine organization has been honored by being named *Franchise of the Year at the 2025 Beyond Activ Americas Awards!* As part of Beyond Activ's celebration of the leading health, active lifestyle and outdoor (HALO)

brands, this recognition reflects Crunch's ongoing commitment to innovation and the member experience.

"To our position now as the fastest-growing fitness company, and a strong trajectory of new club openings and membership growth, we're proud to represent not only our franchise partners, members and Crunch teams worldwide, but also the fitness industry as a whole," said **CHEQUAN LEWIS**, *Crunch Fitness President*.

Lewis, and COO, **MOLLY LONG**, attended the award ceremony in Dallas, Texas, where Lewis commented that he proudly accepted the award on behalf of the company and he said Thank You to the Beyond Activ team and the judges for this recognition. *Club Insider* also congratulates Chequan Lewis and Molly Long on the honor given to their excellent company! Be sure to check out the **Crunch Ad on Page #2**.

■ **MIKE MANNING** is a club industry veteran who has written a terrific article for us entitled: *Things I Have Seen and Learned*. Check it out beginning on **Page #14**.

■ Tennessee-based **National Fitness** is

joining its sister club, California-based **In-Shape Fitness**, for the 11th year of their annual *Fight Cancer Campaign*. In its first ten years, the initiative has raised **more than \$1 million** to support vital services such as free cancer education, emotional support for those diagnosed and free lodging for patients and caregivers who must travel for treatment. Additionally, contributions fuel cutting-edge cancer research, helping to advance prevention, detection and treatment. This year, the goal is to raise **more than \$150,000** by October 31. Members and nonmembers are participating in the campaign through different activities, including kettlebell sales, retail specials, social media activations and more.

■ More news today, on this Monday, October 20th, about pickleball in the *Atlanta-Journal Constitution (AJC)* newspaper with the headline written by **RONI CARYN RABIN** saying: **"Eye injuries rise among people who play pickleball."** The first paragraph then said, *"Some pickleball players have taken a direct hit from a fast-moving ball. Others were struck by a paddle. Some fell on the court. Many suffered injuries to their eyes."* The AJC article continued:



Norm Cates

"The injuries have spiked in recent years by players of pickleball, the fastest growing sport in the U.S. according to a recent report. As the report has gained popularity, it may have attracted less experienced and less fit players who are less agile and less fit players, who are more susceptible to injury," the author noted. "They're not used to how fast the projectiles are moving and how close they are to other players (See **Norm's Notes** Page 7)

About Club Insider

CELEBRATING 30+ YEARS OF TRUST

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Thanks and Appreciation

At *Club Insider*, we are excited to be in our **32nd 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 30+ year run possible.

Very sincere *Thanks and Appreciation* go to the **late 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 did an absolutely excellent job for us all these years and printed every one of our monthly printed editions! And, of course, *Thanks and Appreciation* to the **United States Postal Service** for sending those editions to our readers!

Now, as we have gone all digital, *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 the **Health & Fitness Association** for all it does for all of us. And, sincere *Thanks and Appreciation* to my son, **Justin**, our **Publisher**, who is a truly great business 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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2025 HFA European Congress Draws Fitness Leaders from 30 Countries

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The 22nd Annual HFA European Congress brought together more than 300 fitness industry leaders from 30 countries for deep learning, dynamic networking and global collaboration. Held October 2 - 4 at the historic Beurs van Berlage in Amsterdam, the Congress marked a return to one of Europe's most iconic venues and delivered a powerful experience under the theme *Shaping the Future: Uniting Fitness, Health and Wellness*.

The Congress is put on annually by the Health & Fitness Association (formerly IHRSA). Theo Hendriks, CEO of Sports and Leisure Group, served as this year's local host.

With 18 sessions, two keynotes and language-specific breakouts, the Congress offered a rich platform for top leaders in the industry to exchange knowledge on a wide spectrum of industry concerns. Attendees heard from experts on topics such as investment trends, GLP-1s, franchising, the status of corporate wellness, how philanthropy powers businesses, harnessing AI to increase

impact, breakthrough technologies in the industry and more. Conference highlights included:

■ A keynote from **Phillip Mills**, legendary group exercise innovator, who energized the crowd on day one.

■ A second-day keynote by futurist **Christian Kromme**, who spoke about staying human in a digital era.

■ A fireside chat with **PureGym CEO, Clive Chesser**, about his company's growth story and what others can learn from it.

■ Exclusive insights from **HFA Vice President of Research, Anton Severin**, unveiling data from nearly 30 countries from the 2025 HFA Global Report.

■ The inaugural **Global Advocacy Summit**, featuring thought leaders from the *World Federation of the Sporting Goods Industry*, *Ireland Active*, *ukactive*, *Business at OECD*, *Royal Dutch Football Association* and **HFA**.

HEALTH & FITNESS ASSOCIATION

■ Insights on the state of the boutique studio space from **Alina Cooper** and **Heather Garrick** of *Studio Grow*.

■ Expert-led language breakout discussions.

Attendees also explored new products and services from 11 sponsors in the Sponsor Marketplace.

Early arrivals enjoyed a walking tour of five local clubs, setting the tone for a Congress that blended inspiration with real-world connection. About 40 attendees stayed through October 4 for a bus tour of four additional clubs.

"The energy and spirit of collaboration at this year's Congress were palpable," said **HFA President and CEO, Liz Clark**. "I was inspired to witness leaders from more than 30 countries come

together to share transformative ideas and expand their view of the industry's potential to shape the future of global health. I am excited about the prospect of building upon this executive-level event next year."

The HFA European Congress continues to be the premier gathering for fitness professionals committed to shaping a healthier, more connected world.

HFA thanks the sponsors for the 2025 event: *Freemotion* and *Virtuagym* (Platinum Sponsors); *Matrix* (Gold Sponsor); *Fital*, *Gantner*, *PelviX*, *TaylorMade Designs* and *Your Reformer* (Silver Sponsors); and *ClubPlanner*, *Funxtion* and *Geometrik Target* (Bronze Sponsors).

Next year's event will be held in September in London.

...Club Studio

continued from page 3

A Next-Level Fitness Experience

Club Studio offers innovative classes led by premier instructors and top-tier trainers. Each studio is designed to inspire performance and deliver variety, featuring top of the line fitness equipment and thoughtfully curated amenities that promote both physical and mental well-being. The Club Studio environment fosters a sense of community, encouraging members to push boundaries and achieve their personal fitness goals. Club Studio features five different boutique studio rooms. Here's a breakdown of what members can expect:

■ **Strength:** Boost endurance in a HIIT style training class called CS4 that incorporates

treadmills, rowers, ski-ergs and top of the line functional strength training equipment.

■ **Box:** Glove up and experience nine rounds of signature boxing combinations, athletic drills and a full body burn.

■ **Ride:** Lighting goes down as the beat drops and we get to work. Enjoy a full body indoor cycle rhythm ride incorporating a weight sequence.

■ **Hot Yoga:** Sweat, Flow and Restore to the beat of the music in a radiant heated "Sweat +" studio. Includes traditional yoga asanas, opening yin poses and heart pumping burpees on the mat.

■ **Pilates:** Reset the mind, recharge the soul and realign the body in a reformer-based Pilates class. Our high intensity classes focus on resistance training, time under

tension and muscle grouping to lengthen and strengthen the body.

■ **Cryotherapy and Recovery:** A dedicated area complete with whole body and localized Cryotherapy for athletic recovery and muscle repair. Full access to massage beds, massage rollers, compression and percussion therapy precisely designed to adapt powerful vibration and pressure to the body's unique physiology.

The club also provides towel service, personal training and a *Kalologie Medspa*. Additionally, members can enjoy Beaming, a healthy marketplace offering nourishing drinks, meals and snacks. A retail area is also available for apparel and necessities.

"Club Studio's arrival at Miami Worldcenter marks an important milestone for our development and for Downtown

Miami as a whole. As one of our marquee tenants, Club Studio brings an entirely new level of health and wellness offerings to the urban core, a one-of-a-kind destination that blends boutique fitness, recovery and lifestyle amenities under one roof," said **Nitin Motwani**, *Managing Partner of Miami Worldcenter Associates*. "This is the type of forward-thinking concept that elevates our neighborhood and underscores why Miami Worldcenter is redefining the way people live, work and play in the heart of the city."

Miami Worldcenter was developed by *Miami Worldcenter Associates*, led by *Managing Partners Art Falcone* and **Nitin Motwani**, in partnership with Los Angeles-based *CIM Group*. Spanning ten city blocks in the heart of Downtown Miami, the \$6 billion mixed use development blends residential, retail, hospitality, entertainment and public spaces at the center of the city's cultural core.

...World Gym

continued from page 3

John Caraccio, *President of World Gym Corporation*, said, "As we enter the fourth quarter, I am thrilled to share that we have been experiencing breakthrough growth in both our franchised as well as corporate-owned businesses. Our MFA with Mexico establishes a secure footing in Latin America, while we have solid momentum in Australia and continued growth in Taiwan. We are committed to bringing our mission of health, wellness and community to millions worldwide."

Strategic Mexico MFA Drives Latin American Expansion:

World Gym has signed a pivotal 30-unit Master Franchise Agreement with *International Fitness Group LLC*, strengthening its presence in Mexico. International Fitness Group, which operates 11 locations in the northern Mexico region, will open its first franchise locations under this agreement by the fourth quarter of 2025. This partnership marks a critical step in World Gym's strategy to expand its footprint in Latin America and comes on the back of signing a 50-unit Master Franchise Agreement for Brazil in June.

"This agreement marks a transformative milestone for World Gym in Mexico, allowing us to bring our world-class fitness experience to new communities," said **Ivan Galvan**, *CEO of International*

Fitness Group LLC. "We are excited to expand our footprint and inspire healthier lifestyles across the region."

Robust Growth in Australia:

World Gym has strengthened its leadership in Australia's fitness market with the addition of five new franchise locations in Australind, Bentleigh East, Marrickville, Tuggerah and Waverley Gardens. These openings increase the total number of World Gym locations in Australia to 60, reflecting strong market demand for its innovative fitness offerings and community-focused approach.

Continued Expansion in Taiwan and

Strong Financial Performance:

In Taiwan, World Gym has expanded its corporate-owned portfolio with five new locations in Chiayi Xingye, Zhubei Huaxing, Hsinchu Xiangshan, Miaoli City and Neihu Xingyun, increasing its corporate-owned sites to 141. These new facilities reflect World Gym's commitment to providing accessible, high-quality fitness solutions to its home market. The company also reported record-breaking revenue of NT\$940 million (US\$31 million) for August 2025, a 13.62% year-over-year increase, underscoring the strength of its global operations and brand demand.



Welcome to
the Team!

Hannah Karass
Senior Recruiter | JLR Associates

Connecting exceptional leaders
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JLR Associates Welcomes Hannah Karass as Senior Executive Recruiter

MARGATE CITY, N.J. - JLR Associates, a national executive search firm specializing in the fitness, wellness, and active lifestyle industries, is pleased to announce that **Hannah Karass** has joined the team as **Senior Executive Recruiter**.

A highly respected leader in the fitness and well-being space, Hannah has held senior executive roles with major brands including *Healthworks Fitness*, *Curves/Jenny Craig* and *Crunch Fitness Franchise*, driving innovation, growth and operational excellence across hundreds of locations.

She has also served as *Chairman of the Board for the American Council on*

Exercise (ACE) and has been honored with the *Club Industry Businesswoman of the Year Award* and the *IHRSA (HFA) President's Award*.

"Hannah's leadership experience and deep industry insight make her an invaluable addition to JLR Associates," said **Dennie Noecker**, *President of JLR Associates*. "Her expertise aligns perfectly with our mission to connect great leaders with great organizations."

Hannah can be reached by email at **Hannah@jlrassoc.com** or phone at **(617) 519 - 0012**.



...Norm's Notes

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on the court are," he added. The report continues, "The number of eye injuries is small relative to the number of Americans who play pickleball, estimated to be 19.8 million. But, some injuries were serious enough that they could result in vision loss. *USA Pickleball, the sports governing body in the United States, last year disapproved of a rule change that would require players to wear eye protection in its tournament, saying it would be difficult to enforce.*"

■ Here's a good one folks... this message was broadcast online today, October 21st, by an unhappy health club member here in my hometown of Marietta, Georgia. I quote him verbatim: "I've been a member of a health club on Roswell Road in East Cobb, Marietta since I bought my house in 2014. Today, I walked out forever because I'd had enough of one of the trainers, who has been harassing me at the gym for the last several months. This dude who walks around with a scowl most of the time has been verbally abusive and trying to physically intimidate me. Each time, I've addressed it with the owner. Today, I sat down with the owner. Yet again, he told me he doesn't pay his trainers enough to put up with us East Cobb women! This guy

came at me three times, and that's how the owner addresses it! **Ladies beware. No apology!** AND, he projected the problem on me. You can't make this stuff up! **CUSTOMER NO SERVICE!**"

■ **29 Ways to Better Health...** Folks, the human body is a fascinating and mysterious machine, filled with surprising and strange facts. We've explored the intriguing realms of biology, anatomy and everyday quirks to bring you these incredible tidbits. Ever wanted to be the one at the party with the most jaw-dropping trivia? This is your moment. Our friend has sifted through scientific journals, quirky anecdotes and the oddest corners of human knowledge to compile the ultimate list of weird body facts. Whether you love learning new things or discovering clever ways to improve your health and wellbeing, these weird facts about the human body will provide you with valuable insights and practical benefits. There are 29 different things you can do, and if you want to know what they are, send me an email and I will email them to you: **norm@clubinsideronline.com**.

■ My long-time friend, **DEAN WALLACE**, shared a truly amazing story about an athletic achievement of his in the game of baseball. The following is an exact quote (See *Norm's Notes* Page 8)

Bay Club Deepens its Los Angeles Campus with Acquisition of Griffin Club

SAN FRANCISCO, CA - *The Bay Club Company* ("Bay Club") announces the acquisition of *Griffin Club Los Angeles* ("Griffin Club"), a renowned racquet, athletic, aquatic and social club nestled in the heart of West Los Angeles. The move underscores Bay Club's commitment to cultivating vibrant communities and delivering meaningful, member-centric experiences. Griffin Club joins Bay Club's dynamic and well-established Los Angeles Campus, which also includes Manhattan Country Club, El Segundo, Santa Monica and Redondo Beach.

With 30+ current locations and 150,000+ members, this acquisition marks Bay Club's third major West Coast investment of the year. Alongside the recent 425 *Fitness* and *Harbor Square Athletic Club* announcements in the Pacific

Northwest, the acquisition of Griffin Club marks a strategic milestone as the company continues its thoughtful expansion.

"Griffin Club's legacy and location made it an ideal fit for our Los Angeles Campus and broader portfolio," said **Tracy Cioffi**, *Chief Marketing Officer of The Bay Club Company*. "This acquisition reflects our continued investment in fostering community and connection across our clubs. We are committed to creating spaces that bring families, friends and colleagues together, shaping meaningful communities through shared experiences."

Founded in 1926 as the *Westside Tennis Club*, Griffin Club has evolved from a Hollywood retreat into a modern destination for sports and lifestyle, blending nearly a century of history with a complete \$30 million rebuild in 2018. Celebrated for

its premium facilities and legacy as a social destination, Griffin Club serves as a hub for LA's active lifestyle community. It features 11 LED-lit tennis and pickleball courts, elite coaching and a robust calendar of complimentary classes including Pilates, yoga, spin and barre. Members also enjoy high-end equipment, personal training, upscale locker rooms, two outdoor swimming pools, kids programs and curated dining, all designed to foster connection and community.

"While we continue expanding into new regions, we remain equally focused on strengthening our foundations and supporting our current campuses," said Cioffi. "The acquisition of Griffin Club reflects that commitment, bringing its renowned facilities, vibrant community and third-space ethos into our Los Angeles



Campus to further deliver an exceptional active lifestyle experience."

...Norm's Notes

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that I'm making from *The Book of World Records*:

After 57 Years, Dean L. Wallace Finally Enters the World Record Books

Dear Mr. Wallace,

Warm greetings from *The Book of World Records*.

It gives us immense pride and deep respect to inform you that your remarkable achievement --pitching the entire 17-inning NCAA College Baseball Game on May 4, 1968-- has now been officially recorded and published in our archives.

Your story is one of perseverance, integrity and an unbreakable belief in the value of true sportsmanship. After 57 years, your extraordinary performance has not

only been verified but has also earned its rightful place in the global record books.

We are deeply honored to share with you the following:

Official Article: After 57 Years, Dean L. Wallace Finally Enters the World Record Books

Official Record Entry: Longest NCAA Completed College Baseball Game Ever Pitched by One Pitcher - 17 Innings

World Record Certificate: Record Code: TBWR/US/2025/160925/327

This recognition symbolizes more than a record; it honors a lifetime of dedication, discipline and belief in fair achievement. Your story now stands as an inspiration to countless athletes and dreamers across generations.

On behalf of our global adjudication committee, please accept our heartfelt congratulations. The entire team

at *The Book of World Records* celebrates this milestone with you.

With warm regards and highest respect,

Kenzo Mateo,
Asia Pacific Head & Senior Adjudicator

Congratulations Dean!!!

■ **JUSTIN** and I want to **THANK YOU** for reading **Club Insider**! We appreciate you being with us. And, in particular, **WE VERY SINCERELY APPRECIATE ANY and ALL SUPPORT OF OUR ESTEEMED Club Insider ADVERTISERS! PLEASE DO BUSINESS WITH THEM and WHEN YOU DO, PLEASE TELL 'EM Club Insider SENT YOU! THANK YOU ALL!**

■ **God bless our troops, airmen and sailors worldwide and keep them safe. Thank you, Congratulations and**

Welcome Home to all of our troops who have served around the world. God bless America's Policemen and women and Firemen and women; keep them safe. Finally, God bless you, your family, your club(s) and your members. God Bless America! Laus Deo!

(Norm Cates, Jr. is a 50+ year veteran of the health, racquet and sportsclub industry. He is the Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993 of *Club Insider*, now in its 32nd 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. You can reach Norm by phone at 770-635-7578 or email at Norm@clubinsideronline.com.)

Unapologetically Bold: Redefining Women's Leadership in Fitness & Business

SARA KOOPERMAN, JD - What does leadership look like when women lead on their own terms? *Unapologetically Bold* brings together a powerhouse lineup of international female leaders who are breaking barriers, disrupting industries and reshaping what it means to lead in fitness, wellness and business.

From tech founders and legal changemakers to fitness disruptors and executive coaches, these stories don't just inspire, they challenge the status quo. Whether it's turning a struggling studio into a tech platform, finding light after public online hate or rebuilding from burnout to breakthrough, every chapter is a reminder that **you don't need permission to lead boldly**.

Spotlight on Sara Kooperman: Fitness Visionary, Legal Mind & Relentless Trailblazer

From the basement to the boardroom, **Sara Kooperman, JD**, has sweated, stumbled and sprinted her way through a career that redefined the fitness industry. What began as a law student's stress-relief aerobics class in a basement (complete with \$3 drop-ins and cassette tapes) transformed into a lifelong mission to move minds, bodies and an entire profession.

In her unapologetically honest chapter of the FREE eBook, *Unapologetically Bold*, created by **Mel Tempest**, Sara shares how that single class became the foundation for *SCW Fitness Education*, *WATERinMOTION* and multiple fitness education brands

that have empowered more than 100,000 fitness professionals worldwide. From startup hustle to industry leadership, her story celebrates the messy middle, where laughter, late nights and pure determination collide.

But, it's not just her business acumen that defines her, it's her bold philosophy: *Show up. Speak up. Don't back down*. Especially when you're the only woman in the room. With humor, grit and a fearless refusal to play small, Sara reminds readers that leadership isn't about waiting for permission, it's about claiming your seat, even when no one's expecting you (and few are looking!).

Sara expands on her journey in her best-selling book *Fit For Business* (available on Amazon), where she shares the behind-the-scenes lessons of building

one of the most trusted names in fitness education, balancing strategy, sweat and a whole lot of heart.

These powerhouse women are reshaping the fitness and wellness industry in bold, innovative ways:

■ **Edwina Griffin** blends 30+ years of expertise in fitness, mental health and leadership, now leading virtual wellness tech through *AtOne*.

■ **Analee Matthews** is an award-winning writer and editor behind major fitness publications through her business, *All Smiles Creative*.

■ **Allison Flatley**, a respected consultant and former HFA Board Member, mentors (See **Sara Kooperman** Page 16)



INCURABLE IS UNACCEPTABLE



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venmo

...John McCarthy

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change the world of clubs, and I'm pleased to be able to say that, with Big John's hard work alongside his world class staff, and with many excellent IHRSA Board Members who worked with John over 25 years, I think we did change the world of health and fitness clubs significantly.

"Don't worry about making it perfect... Let's just get it done!" are words John says he repeatedly heard from me week after week on our regular Friday afternoon phone calls when I served as IRSAs 1st President in 1981/82.

I'd asked John to call me every Friday with updates on the fledgling Association, and he did that without fail. With John in Boston, me in Atlanta and with no Internet, phone calls, faxes and the U.S. Mail had to be our methods of communication. During IRSAs first year, I had great confidence in John and his leadership of IRSAs, and I continued to have that complete faith for all of the 25 years John served as our IHRSA Executive Director.

Last month (October 2014), *Club Industry's* **Stuart Goldman** produced a terrific article about John, and if you have not read it yet, I think you will find it interesting and well done. Stuart interviewed Rick Caro and me, and he also shared comments from a number of John's IHRSA friends who were involved since day one. And, of course, he spoke with John McCarthy himself.

Here are my comments about Big John, quoted exactly from Stuarts article:

NORM CATES, IHRSA Co-Founder: "John was an amazing ambassador for the idea, and that idea was to make our industry better through an Association that would not hold back in its sharing of expertise. Getting John McCarthy and Chuck Leve together as a team at the beginning of



John McCarthy

IHRSA was the luckiest thing we could have ever done. And, since then, our luck has continued with Joe Moore at the helm, and Tom Hunt as his teammate, both continuing John's work with IHRSA's world class staff.

John led the leaders. We were the leaders, and John led us and gave us the ability to have complete faith in him and just kicked [butt]. John took the opportunity and ran with it and never put the ball down until he had gone across the goal line many times. I'm proud to have worked with him and proud to have had those many phone calls over the year that I was President. You could depend on him like the day was long.

John's legacy is going to be that he changed the world that we lived in this industry, and I mean he changed it big time. He gave this industry a future of excellence through his dedication and his travels and his hard work, and his always presence at that front door right at the entrance of every convention when it would start, he was there shaking hands. John was the best thing that ever happened to the Association and probably that ever will. He was a treasure --and he still is, of course-- for this industry."

Club Insider is very proud to



John McCarthy Accepting Club Industry's Lifetime Achievement Award

present the following in-depth interview with **Big John McCarthy**, as we shared some fond memories of times long-passed and his thoughts about the industry, now and in the future.

An In-Depth Interview With IHRSA Founding Executive Director John McCarthy

Club Insider (C.I.) - As a young man, you excelled at sports. Please tell us about that and what it has meant to your life.

John McCarthy (JMC) - I've always loved all sports. My two best sports were basketball and tennis. I just played them all the time. Of course, growing up in Chicago, it was a seasonal deal. So, you played basketball all during the school year, and I played tennis all during the Summer when I was a boy. I got to be *very good* at basketball, and I would just say *good* in tennis. But, I enjoyed both games and had a lot of fun with both. As a high school and college athlete, those were probably the most enjoyable experiences of my youth playing on all of those teams with friends of mine. So, I loved sports from day one.

C.I. - Did you play tennis for *Notre Dame* as well as basketball?

JMC - No, I didn't. I just played basketball. We had basketball practice all year round, and it began with cross-country in the Fall and went year round. I played both sports before college for the fun of it.

C.I. - What led you to Seminary? Please tell us about that experience.

JMC - Back in the 1950s, when I was a young boy, a lot of the Army Chaplains had come back from World War II. I admired those guys so much! I thought that could be a really interesting life. They were tremendous fellows... tremendous men. Then, I went to a Catholic High School, and I liked a lot of the priests who were

there. So, I thought, 'Maybe that's a good thing for me to do.' So, I thought that, after I graduated from college, I would give it a try, which I did. I went to the Seminary, and I was ordained in 1965. My assignment there was to be a teacher at the *University of St. Thomas* in St. Paul, Minnesota. I taught there for five years, and I loved that.

At about the same time, I knew that I wasn't cut out for not being married. So, knowing that being a priest was not going to work out, I left the priesthood knowing that I wouldn't be able to live the life of a single man. Then, I came to graduate school to try to get a Ph.D., which I never got. But, I had a nice experience at graduate school. To make money during graduate school, I was a tennis pro in all sorts of different clubs around Boston. That was a fun experience. Then, in 1975, I became part owner and the manager of a tennis club with a fitness center in the basement in one of the suburbs around Boston. That, too, was a lot of fun, and that was my introduction to the sports and fitness club industry. The fitness center was absolutely primitive. We had a *Universal Machine* in the basement and a couple of bikes and a couple of medicine balls. That was our fitness center. We didn't have a fitness director. It was primitive, very, very primitive.

C.I. - That description reminds me of the fitness center at **Dick Trant's** tennis club!
JMC - Well, it was a little bigger than Trant's fitness center but not much bigger. I'd say it was a 300 or 400 square-foot room. Dick Trant was a key guy for me. He had started a regional club association called *The New England Racquet Sports Association (NEHRSA)*. I became part of that, and our friends, the late **Dale Dibble** and the late **Tim Richards**, were involved. God bless them.

Nick Cotsidas, and a lot of other guys you know were also involved. These were great guys, and they were all more experienced
(See **John McCarthy** Page 12)



Norm Cates and John McCarthy

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...John McCarthy

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than I was, a lot more experienced. Trant was head of the whole thing. He sort of took me under his wing, and then, he asked me if I would be the *Executive Director* of that group, which I was happy to do because I enjoyed working with Dick as he always had brilliant ideas. So, that's how I got into the combination of the sports club business and the association business.

So, when Rick and you decided to put together the two associations (*NTA* and *NCCA*), Trant put my hat in the ring and told everyone, 'I've got a guy who's building this New England Association.' We'd already changed it from a tennis association to a racquet sports association, so we had both racquetball and tennis club owners involved. Both of those sports were doing well at the time, so we were growing like a weed. I was sort of in the right place at the right time. You and Rick were looking for a guy who had worked with the racquetball clubs and the tennis clubs and saw fitness coming. You guys saw fitness coming, and at the time, you thought more clearly on that than I did. We just thought there was a wonderful opportunity there. Then, you and Rick gave me the opportunity, and that was one of the luckiest breaks of my life. You know, it was really through you, Rick and Dick Trant that it all happened.

And, of course, Dale Dibble was one of our biggest early supporters. He was really cool. He spent his whole career with *General Electric*, so he learned business. And, he was one of the first guys to put the whole thing together. You know... the tennis... the racquetball... the fitness... the aerobics... He had everything... indoor and outdoor swimming pools and so on. Dale and **Red Lerille** were so far ahead of the rest of us. Everybody in the industry went to visit Red's club in Lafayette, Louisiana and Dale's (and Zoe and Ed Veasey's) *Cedardale* in Haverhill, Massachusetts to learn what they could learn from them.

C.I. - Let's talk about that great luck... In my opinion, our finding you at that time and place was by far the luckiest thing that ever happened to the health, racquet and sports club industry, and we owe Dick Trant a huge word of THANKS for the introduction! And, as you mentioned earlier about Dale Dibble, the man I've called, 'Mr. Enthusiasm,' for a long time, that reminds me to mention that I was very honored in 2001 when IHRSA named its *Distinguished Service Award* after our good friend Dale and honored me with the first ever Dale Dibble Distinguished Service Award. John, I also want to mention that you were honored by IHRSA with the Dale Dibble Award in 1988. Plus, IHRSA established *The John McCarthy Merit Scholarship* and *Industry Visionary Award*, and winners of the Industry Visionary honor include: **Gary Heavin**, 2004; **Joe Cirulli**, 2005; **Peter Kight**, 2006; **Chuck Runyon** and **Jeff Klingner**, 2009; **Phil Wendel**

and **Lloyd and Roberta Gainsboro**, 2010; and **Alberto Perlman**, 2013.

JMC - Thinking back on those early days, Norm, I will never forget. You and I had a deal that I was supposed to call you every Friday afternoon, and I was faithful to that. And, your big thing was whatever we were doing, you always said the same thing, 'Get it done! Get it out! Don't wait until it's perfect, get it out!' You had two things that you wanted to do: **(1)** Get it out... whatever it was that we were working on at the time, and **(2)** You wanted us to grow the Association to get it to critical mass so we could attract the trade association members... attract the guys like **Augie**. You sort of set the standard... keep moving as fast as you can and build the membership as fast as we can. That would be the secret. Norm, we stuck with that. That was your plan, and I swear that we stuck with that the whole time. To grow it, to build it and to just keep moving.

C.I. - To *make it happen!* Looking back on those days, almost 34 years now (now 44), that truly was an amazing experience that we had together. Now that we're talking about great luck, here's another experience that ended up with us Irishmen being mighty lucky. As the leader and last President of *NCCA* and first President of *IRSA*, I had the chore of jumping on an airplane to Chicago to perform a tough task: to inform our good friend, Chuck Leve, that he was laid off. I had not laid off a lot of people at that stage of my business life, and I was not at all sure of what I was going to say to Chuck the next morning when we were scheduled to meet. But, while I was on the plane on the way to Chicago, I dreamed up the idea of putting Chuck into the role he ended up holding for 27 years at *IRSA/IHRSA*, the role of *Associate Member Director*, in which it was his job to recruit manufacturers and vendors to become Associate Members, Trade Show Exhibitors, etc. Chuck did a magnificent job all of those years. So,

when I got to my hotel in Chicago that evening, I called all of the new *IRSA* Board Members. I asked them what they thought about this new job for Chuck, who I had to fire the next morning. Everybody loved the idea! I didn't even have a clue that I was going to think of this when I got on that airplane (*John laughs*). I really didn't! **JMC** - Your idea of bringing Chuck on board was the luckiest thing we ever did because he loved that assignment of bringing in those Associate Members. Most of the people don't know it, but Chuck did everything. He sold the advertising for *CBI Magazine*, he sold the sponsorships and he sold the booths for the Trade Show. Those dollars, Norm, were the profitable dollars. The membership dollars were not profitable dollars. He brought in the money that let us grow.

C.I. - You and Chuck were a great team for 25 years until you retired. Most people in our industry know Chuck went on for a total of 27 years at *IHRSA*, and he's now working with his son, Josh, developing the *Association of Fitness Studios (AFS)*. The fledgling *AFS* is celebrating its 1st Anniversary this month, and I wish Josh, Chuck and Josh's partner, Brad Elson, well in their endeavors.

Publisher's Note: Chuck Leve passed away in 2021. **May Chuck Leve rest in peace.**

C.I. - John, please think back to when you became *IHRSA's* Executive Director and share a few of those memories about some of the wonderful people who helped us make *I(H)RSA* happen and become an International force. **JMC** - You know, Norm, we were really blessed. We had some great people on our Board, and of course, you were involved throughout all of that period. And, they were all positive people. Everybody had their oar in the water, and they were feeding us

leads. They would tell us to call this guy... call that guy. So, we had a great team there. It was just fabulous, just fabulous!

C.I. - During your incredibly successful 25-year career with *IHRSA*, which changed our industry for the better forever, please tell us about three of your (or *IHRSA's*) greatest challenges and three of your (or *IHRSA's*) greatest triumphs. **JMC** - When I look back over 25 years, the greatest challenge for the fitness industry has been the high turnover rate of club members.

The second greatest challenge is we've always been incredibly successful at attracting the athletic and fit people. BUT, we've never really been successful at attracting the unfit and the non-athletic, and that's the majority of the population. So, that's a problem that we still haven't solved. The only company that has had some success with that... that I know of... is *Curves*. They targeted the middle-age overweight woman... of course, they would never admit to that. By middle-age, I mean women who are 40 to 60 and were overweight. They hit a home run with that group! Of course, the company I'm involved with now, *North Castle Partners*, bought them and is going to try to recreate the magic that **Gary Heavin** started with that wonderful company.

The third challenge in the industry, and this is my own point of view, Norm, is I see the fitness business somewhat similar to the way I look at the restaurant business and the hotel business; I see it as a hospitality business. And, I don't think we have even begun to master that dimension of the business. That is... welcoming people, making them feel comfortable, making them feel appreciated, making them feel that they're important to us... it's really mastering hospitality skills that some people like we talked about have it naturally, people like Dale Dibble and Red Lerille and **Joe Cirulli**. I have so many memories of being in Dale's club where he talked to every member who passed us. It's the same way with Red Lerille and Joe Cirulli. They are just the masters of hospitality. They should be icons for our whole industry to emulate. That's the missing link in our industry as I see it... *making it a hospitality business*. We haven't really mastered that piece of the business yet.

C.I. - Indeed, John. BUT... you left out one comment about yourself, which I will make for you here by describing you as the, '*IHRSA Hand Shaker In Chief*,' which is my way of remembering all those years where you were stationed at the entrance to the *IHRSA* Conventions Opening Receptions. By the end of the night, you'd have shaken everyone's hands in the room! Talk about mastering hospitality... you did that in spades and continue to do so!

Also, John, it's ironic that you mention the same two industries that I (*See John McCarthy Page 13*)



John McCarthy and the late Julie Main




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...John McCarthy

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write about, the restaurant and the hotel industries, when I explain to our readers that our industry is truly just an infant when compared to those two industries and that we do have a great deal to learn from them in our industry. In the past, when explaining how young our industry actually is, I mention that the hotel industry is at least 2014 years old, if you're one who believes that the baby Jesus was born in a manger because, 'The Inn was full.' So, your comments here reinforce my writings where I argue to my readers that our maybe 70- or 75-year old industry truly is very young, and we still have a lot to learn from other industries! **JMC** - And, we haven't really focused on it the way we should. I mean... we're good... but we're not anywhere near to where we should be.

C.I. - Well, John, you're really touching on one of my favorite subjects. As a *Club Insider* reader, I'm sure you've noticed the little ads we publish every month urging our readers to **Make It Fun!** in their clubs. By producing those little ads for years now, we've been trying to help persuade everybody who owns and operates a club anywhere that they will be much more successful if they will **Make It Fun!** for

BOTH their employees and their members. We've been doing these little ads every month for 21 years now (now 32) since *Club Insider* first started. And, guess what, John? You may recall writing an article for *Club Insider* way back when we were just getting started. In your article, when you became one of our earliest *Club Insider Contributing Authors*, you quoted the late **Dr. George Sheehan** from his writing in *Runner World Magazine*, who'd written and I quote: **"Human beings will not continue for long to do anything no matter how good it is for them, unless it is pleasurable, unless it is sociable, unless it is entertaining, unless it is FUN!"** Did Dr. Sheehan *"Tell-it-like-it-is!"* or what? The man was a prophet! **JMC** - Yes! That's as true today as it was when he wrote it! We haven't mastered this yet, and we have a long way to go!

C.I. - Okay, Big John, you've covered the three biggest challenges for the industry, thus for IHRSA. Now, how about three of your greatest successes during your 25 years at IHRSA?

JMC - I'd say the first was that we decided very early --you were there Norm-- that we were going to go International. That was just a stroke of luck. I mean, when you and Rick and a couple of other guys said, 'It's not going be just the U.S. We're going to go global,' it so happened that the United

States was ahead of the rest of the world, and so the leaders in Japan and Europe and Asia and South America... if they wanted to grow, they wanted to be part of the U.S. deal. So, we were incredibly lucky with our timing and going at exactly the right time. Rick would travel to China... he'd go anywhere!

That tied into the next thing, and this is where Chuck Leve came into the picture. That was because we were the only group in the world that was bringing people together from around the globe. So, we were the first one to have an International Trade Show. That became a huge success, and it's still a success! We were very, very fortunate there. Those were two big things.

The final thing was that, in the beginning, IHRSA was all about giving people information. How to do this... how to do that, etc. Then, *public policy became very big*. Now, it's even bigger, I think. The information about how to build and operate a great club... that's out there... But, the public policy challenges are so big and so huge right now, as you know, Norm. We've got a government that wants to rule everything. I won't get you started, Norm, and I won't get myself started, either (both laugh). There are more laws about everything. They want to regulate the heat of the water in the whirlpools! Everything! So, that's become just a huge thing for

IHRSA right now. We've got a great leader in that effort in **Helen Durkin**, and she does a hell of a job.

C.I. - IHRSA's doing really great work in that area... they had something like 88 victories and only two losses over five years, or some outrageous number like that! **JMC** - It's just amazing! Every year, Helen Durkin sends me a scorecard on how they're doing. Every year, it's something like 30 wins and two losses! I mean they are world class when it comes to public policy. I don't think there is another Association in the world that would have their win/loss record. They've got two stars... Helen does the big ones, and they have another young woman, **Amy Bantham**, who has a Ph.D. in public policy from Harvard, and she's a bright one, too! They are an incredible team.

C.I. - John, I may be wrong, but it seems to me that the biggest challenge Joe Moore and Helen and her Team have with IHRSA public policy is getting people (Member Clubs and Associate Members) to listen and participate. We need to get them to pay attention and participate. All that has to happen is have one ill-advised legislator propose something that's going to be horribly detrimental to clubs, and then, use one of

(See **John McCarthy** Page 15)

Things I Have Seen and Learned

By: **Mike Manning**

As a CFO, Adviser or Board Member for almost 20 years and a Gym Member for 35 years, I've seen a lot of good and a lot of bad in the fitness industry. What follows are a few things I have seen and learned:

Marketing as a Percent of Revenue - The most successful club chain in the industry today spends 9% of club revenue on marketing, and its EBITDA as a percentage of revenue at the club level is typically as high or higher than any other club's P&L I have ever seen. What do you spend on marketing? Good marketing more than pays for itself, but you eventually reach a point of diminishing returns. In my opinion, 4% of revenue seems like the low end of reasonable, and my friend **Bill Hubner**, who owned around 200 clubs over time, says 5% of revenue would be his minimum and that he used to spend 8%.

All Revenue is not Created Equal - Monthly recurring dues are the lifeblood of the industry and usually have a profit margin of over 90%. No other revenue stream matters nearly as much. Signing up as many new members as possible each month is the most important thing an operator can do followed closely by retaining existing members. Attrition can be controlled to a degree, but no matter what you do, members will pass away, move away or have financial difficulties that require them to drop out. My best guess is that maybe 1/3 of attrition can be prevented. Years ago, the CEO of a large club chain got so laser-focused on controlling attrition that the company got slack on signing up new members, and it did not end well. Selling prepaid memberships for 12 months or longer robs from the future to get you through the present and should generally be avoided unless there is a pressing need for cash. Enrollment revenue is great if you can get it, especially if you have a sales staff to pay, but it seems to have mostly gone away over the last 15 years in low- and mid-tier priced clubs with increased HVLP competition. Last year, I wrote an article for *Club Insider* that detailed how much I dislike annual maintenance or enhancement fees, which you can find in their Archives (www.clubinsideronline.com/archives). The more complex ancillary revenue sources become, the easier it is to lose money on them, but it should be hard to lose money selling bottled water and a small number of popular items. Selling clothing and having juice bars can involve a lot of work for no profit, but branded clothing can be a marketing expense if it is nice enough that members will wear it around town and promote your club.

Unaffiliated Personal Trainers in the Club - I see clubs that are really hard on members about not letting them be walked through a workout by someone who is not an employee of the club and wonder how much dues revenue they are costing themselves by chasing after lower margin personal training revenue because the members often get mad when confronted, cancel their membership and might take several of their friends with them. Sometimes, the person leading these workouts is just a friend or family member and no money is changing hands, which is a very different thing than having a professional non-employee personal trainer working in your club with your members. As a club owner, you probably already understand the difference in profit margin between monthly dues and personal training sessions, but do your club managers understand it? Do your personal trainers understand it? A member being walked through a workout by a friend will be just as angry at your club whether it is the general manager or a personal trainer looking for new clients who confronts them.

First Impressions Matter - Running successful clubs will always include having friendly and well-trained employees, keeping the club clean, maintaining the equipment and replacing or refurbishing the equipment on a regular cycle as it naturally wears out. Having someone friendly at the front desk who knows your members by name as they walk into your club can be one of your best member retention tools. Having dirty showers, a dusty gym floor or frequently being out of paper towels will hurt you because members talk about those things with their friends who might otherwise join your club. And, having worn out equipment when you are competing with a new club a mile away will hurt you badly.

Educating Club Managers - In the last few months, I've become aware of a club general manager in a good-sized chain who has gotten a bit out of control cancelling memberships. If you arrive a couple of times within ten minutes before the staff gets off work for the night, this manager will cancel your membership. If you are ten minutes late picking up your child from child-care even if the class you were taking started ten minutes late, this manager will cancel your membership. Bad business instincts and bad habits can sometimes be overcome with training from regional or corporate leaders, and this manager obviously does not understand the value of dues paying members and that every effort should be made to keep them and not cancel them. Sometimes, a manager needs to revoke a membership... But,

the bar should be high, and the member should be doing something outrageous or putting other people in danger and not responding to interventions from management. Managers should be trained about how to have awkward conversations with members whose behavior needs to change, and many of them obviously have not been.

Fixing Messes - A business turnaround specialist I've met a couple of times at corporate governance conferences likes to say that, with enough time and enough money, any struggling business can be turned around, and I completely agree. But, time, money or both are often limited. Every situation that involves fixing a mess is a bit different, but history in the fitness industry tends to rhyme, and the same types of problems tend to pop up at different club chains over time.

Good vs. Okay Club Locations - When growing, signing a lease for an "A location" where the landlord will not negotiate on the rental rate or TI money is usually better than signing a lease on a "C location" where the landlord will drop rent significantly or offer a lot of TI money to get you in the space. This is because the landlord will usually drop the rent significantly or offer a lot of TI money to get you in the C Space, knowing the location is poor.

Site Selection Mistakes - A common way to get good at site selection is to make several mistakes that you learn from. It is much better to learn from someone else's mistakes and avoid making them yourself. A bad location caused by poor site selection is hard to turn around no matter how much money, marketing and talent you throw at it. The best thing about opening a bad location is that the lease eventually ends. Doing a few bad locations in a short time will badly hurt your ability to grow. I once did due diligence on an acquisition where the club chain had done 61 good clubs in a row before making its first site-selection mistake, which remains the best streak I have personally seen. Most chains I've looked at have had at least one site selection mistake in the first 15 clubs, and it is not uncommon to see several mistakes in the first 15 clubs.

Site Selection and Fast Growth - Founders of growing chains sometimes get cocky about site selection and will sign a lease for a challenging location because they are confident that they could make the location work if they were the general manager. They might be correct about that, but often, the talent level of newer general managers in a growing club chain is not comparable to having the founder in that



Mike Manning

new club, so it struggles. Growing and maintaining the manager pipeline is one of the biggest challenges growing club chains face. Holding out for A locations only almost always works better than taking chances on marginal locations.

Negotiate a Favorable Lease - A 10-year base lease with several extensions is better than a 15-year base lease with extensions because the surrounding demographics can change quite a bit in ten years, and you might want to end the lease after the base term. You can probably lock up the location for 25 or 30 years either way after the lease extensions are considered. I once talked a landlord into reducing the rental rate during the extension periods since the TI they paid us on the front was paid back in the base lease term, but landlords will fight not to do that since it impacts their ability to borrow additional money on the building as time passes. Ask anyway. What landlord would not want 30 years of payments on a loan that was paid back in ten years? Annual rent adjustments linked to CPI increases are something I always tried to negotiate out of leases. As we've seen the last few years, inflation can ramp up and stay high for a while. If a landlord insisted on annual rent increases, I always tried to stick to fixed dollar increases of 2% or less to protect against rapid inflation, especially since I've never been a fan of increasing monthly dues pricing for existing members.

Personal Guarantees - Personal guarantees should be avoided, but they can be hard to get out of if you need your landlord to give you a lot of TI money to get the club built. After you have half a dozen clubs up and running, the business should stand on its own with no personal guarantees from you to landlords. Hold firm, and many landlords will back off the guarantee. And, it will not kill you to walk away if they do not back off. Any personal
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their seedy 'after hours' tactics to get it voted in without our industry's representatives having a fair opportunity to register their opposition before the vote. With this world the way it is, by the time they could get in their car and go home, it could screw up the health and fitness club industry in that State so much that the club owners there could end up in big trouble, and I'm talking about *clubs going out of business kind of big trouble* with some of this stuff! **JMC** - You're absolutely right. At some time, Norm, you ought to do a Q&A with Helen Durkin because she's been doing this for years, and she really knows her stuff. First of all, she would agree 100% with you that a lot of people in the industry have to wake up and realize that their business is at stake with some of these government rules that could be passed. You've been preaching that since day one. So, I don't have to say a thing to you about that.

C.I. - Yeah, but John, I'm asking myself, 'Are they listening?' Just like with you, they are my friends and I worry about their businesses' futures and their families. I really do. I don't get any letters from anybody saying to me, 'Hey Norm, I know you're absolutely right... we need to support IHRSA's Public Policy efforts!' I don't get any letters like that. We need to do a cover story on Public Policy!

■ ■ ■

C.I. - After 25 years, some would call it a career; however, you're still involved in our industry in several ways. Please tell us about those opportunities and responsibilities. **JMC** - I'm very lucky that I'm involved with great people. I know you know these people. I'm working with **John Aglialoro** of *Cybex*. He's a terrific guy. I've worked with him almost since the time I left IHRSA nearly eight years ago. I love him and his company; they're doing great. They had that one terrible lawsuit with the young woman who got hurt, and they recovered from that. They also took *Cybex* out of the public marketplace. That saves \$1 million a year with all the rules and regulations involved with being publicly traded. *Cybex* is growing well with high single, almost double digit growth every year. John's a great and fun guy. You know... he's made three movies. He's a talented, fearless and good man.

I'm also involved in *North Castle Partners*, a private equity company that's always been involved in the health club business. They owned *Equinox*, as well as *World Health*, *Octane Fitness* and *Curves* right now. **Chip Baird** is the CEO, and that's a wonderful company to be associated with.

And, the third thing is *Augie's Quest*. Every year that you and I were working together at IHRSA, Augie was

our #1 exhibitor, our #1 sponsor, our #1 advertiser... Augie was #1 at IHRSA. Augie once told me, 'John, whenever you are doing something new, let me know and I'd like to take a look at it and maybe we will sponsor it.'

C.I. - Augie was our *Bell Cow* for IHRSA when you think about it! He always led the way no matter what was going on. I know having Chuck Leve was extremely important, but getting Augie and *Life Fitness* on board and behind I(H)RSA at the time was huge! They had to be among the first five IHRSA Associate Members to come on board. **JMC** - You're exactly right. If Augie was going to take the Back Cover and the Inside Front Cover of the magazine, everybody else would follow and say, 'We've got to be there, too.' If Augie was going to take 8 booths, or 12 booths or 20 booths, everybody else would say, 'We've at least got to be close!'

C.I. - What Augie and Lynne have had to go through with this battle with ALS just breaks my heart. But, I believe they are going to **Win The War On ALS!** **JMC** - Augie is an amazing, amazing man. You and I and a whole lot of our friends have been supporting him since day one. Norm, you have been an Ace in the hole for Augie. You've always supported him, and you're always here, so I know he appreciates you very much.

C.I. - John, I just wish we could do more. But, I want to say my most sincere Thanks and Appreciation to you for your leadership of *The Bash for Augie's Quest*. What you've done for the cause of defeating ALS is huge, and I know Augie and Lynne appreciate greatly what you have and are doing. To me, the very fact that Augie and Lynne will be hitting the 10th Anniversary Milestone of his fight with ALS is clear enough proof that Augie has been divinely chosen to do what he's doing, and I believe deep in my heart and soul that he's going to **Win the War on ALS!** And, when he does, we can all be dancing in the streets because this amazing man and the incredible team his lovely wife, Lynne, and he have built will be changing the world hugely for many people. With the 10th Anniversary of Augie's Quest and The IHRSA Bash coming in March approaching, please give us a status report. What's planned for the future of this incredible cause?

JMC - Norm, Augie is more alive than ever... more energetic and more committed than ever... and more successful than ever! He's so committed to curing ALS it's just unbelievable. He's one in a million. We're all privileged to know and work with him. This is the 10th Anniversary, and we're going to make it the biggest and best ever. We're all committed to that.

C.I. - John, please let me know what Justin and I can do to help.

JMC - Norm, you've been out front every

year, so Thank You so much.

Publisher's Note: Augie Nieto passed away in 2023 after an 18-year battle with ALS. Augie and Lynne Nieto changed the landscape for those battling this horrible disease. **May Augie Nieto rest in peace.**

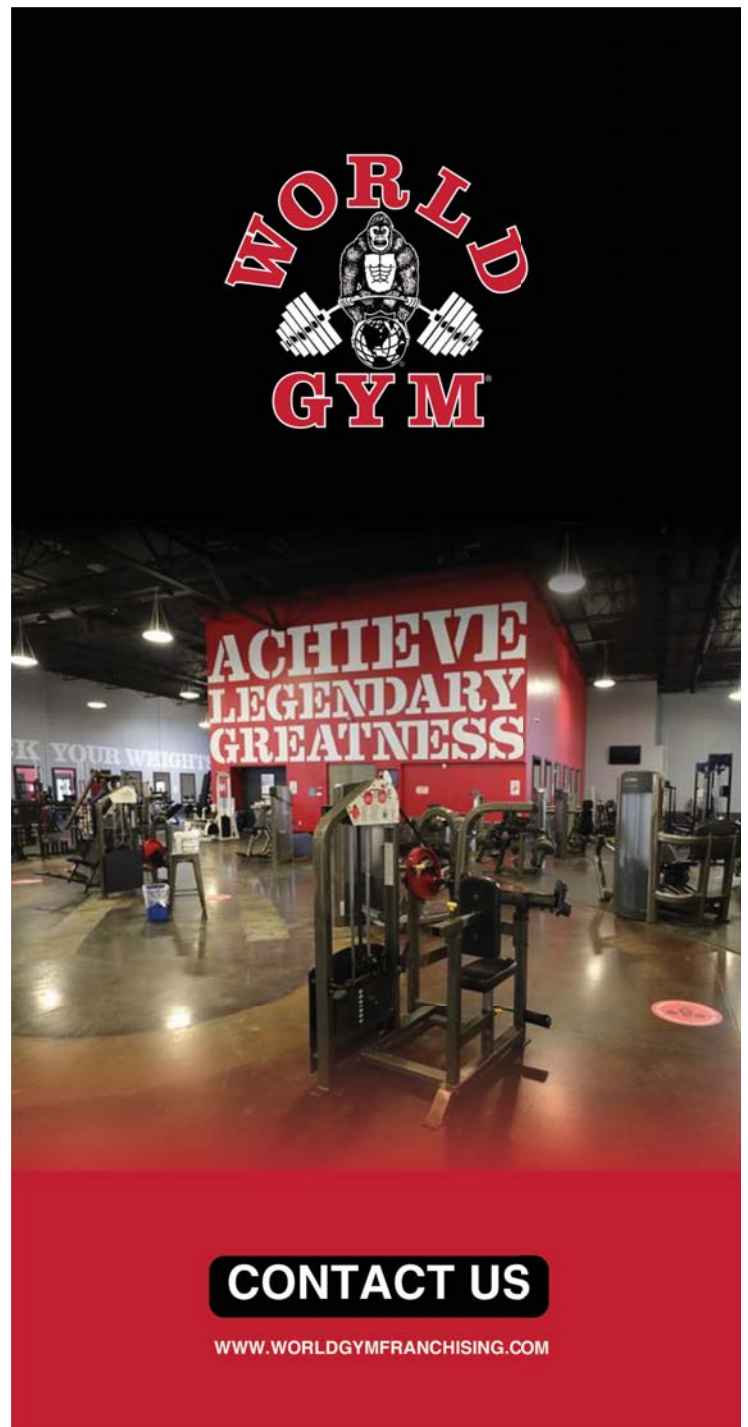
C.I. - What would you say are the *Top 5 Industry Events* that happened during your 25 years of IHRSA Service, and since you retired. **JMC** - I believe that the Top Industry Events were:

1. Globalization of the industry... that's huge.

2. Then, I'd say that the link between exercise and health, no matter whether it's physical, mental or emotional health, has been established. It has become clear that we're involved in something that is incredibly important and valuable, and none of us, and I mean none of us, realized how important it was when we got started.

3. The third thing was, and you and I go way, way back when the industry was 80 to 90% men, now it's like 45% men and 55% women. That's because of what **Peter and Kathie Davis** of *IDEA* and the other leaders

(See **John McCarthy** Page 17)



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...Sara Kooperman

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fitness leaders through strategy and engagement.

■ **Joey Toutounji**, aka Feel Good Joey, uses her marketing agency, *COM Marketing*, to empower wellness businesses to grow with impact.

■ **Rachel Young** is a consultant known for product development, revenue growth, and strategic leadership.

■ **Laura Munkholm**, co-founder of *Walla*,

helps boutique studios scale through heart-led tech and hosts the *Well, Well, Well* podcast.

■ **Jen Dugard**, *Founder of MumSafe*, is a pre/postnatal fitness expert raising standards globally for maternal care in fitness.

■ **Wendy White**, *Chief Marketing Officer at Daxko*, leads global fitness brand growth through marketing innovation and mentorship.

■ **Joanne Groves**, a myth-busting educator, helps trainers and clubs ditch outdated

methods for evidence-based solutions.

■ **Rosanna Tucker** is a fitness entrepreneur with a strong foundation in sports psychology and therapy.

■ **Tracy Minnoch Nuku**, podcast host and author, champions midlife women through *SexyAgeing*.

■ **Mel Tempest**, *Founder of Ignite Fitness Business Events*, is a globally recognized club owner, podcaster and fierce advocate for women and independent fitness businesses.

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Sara Kooperman, JD

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Make It Fun!

...Mike Manning

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guarantees on leases should end when the base lease ends and not carry forward to any negotiated lease extensions, but you cannot blame landlords for asking. Unless you have a good lawyer when negotiating your leases, any personal guarantees you give landlords on leases will not necessarily go away if you sell your company before the lease ends, and that needs to be negotiated before the lease is signed. A buyer of your clubs assuming your personal guarantees on leases in a purchase agreement does not mean your former landlords cannot come after you if the buyer later defaults on the leases or bankrupts. Avoid personal guarantees to lenders and business partners, too. After 10 or 12 clubs, the bank should not need your personal guarantee, but they will keep asking for it. Get good at saying "no" when someone asks you for your personal guarantee.

Get a Good Attorney - Paying a higher rate to get a good attorney will save you money in the long run because a mediocre attorney who charges less will eventually get you in trouble that will cost you a lot of time and money to get out of.

Surround Yourself with Smart People - Try to figure out what you do not know and find people to work for you who are good at those things. No one is good at everything.

Private Equity: Is it right for you? - Once you reach a certain number of clubs, if you are doing well and creating wealth, you will attract interest from Private Equity ("PE") groups. Like CFOs, salespeople and any other profession, some PE professionals are much better than others, and it is not always easy to tell the difference before the money moves. The best PE professionals

will understand what they know and do not know about your business and seek to help you in the areas you probably are not as good at, like continually raising significant money to grow while minimizing equity dilution for the shareholders. If they have good business instincts, they might even have a few ideas that are beneficial to the operation of your business, and they will keep a cool head in a crisis. The worst PE professionals might be described as "educated idiots" who do not understand what they do not know, will fight with you about things that do not matter or things they do not understand, and might not handle a crisis well. Many PE groups will insist on taking a majority equity interest in your company, but some will take a minority equity stake in your business that comes with a veto of significant actions you might want to take and might include a put option they can exercise to be bought out at a future date with a certain guaranteed rate of return. There are advantages and disadvantages to doing a minority equity deal, but if you do one, you need to achieve the agreed growth plan or the value of PE group's equity can grow while yours shrinks. If you give up voting control, the PE group generally needs to have the same class of stock that you do when the deal closes. If you give up voting control and the business experiences some turbulence, your PE partner can terminate you, which more than a few fitness industry CEOs have learned the hard way. There are a few PE investors who have invested in the fitness industry, made a lot of money and still do not understand how the industry works, but they were smart enough to stay in their lane and enjoy the ride.

Learning About PE - I have a hard time thinking of a large successful company in our industry today that has not had PE backing, so if you want to grow to have

100 or 1,000 clubs, you probably need to start educating yourself on how PE works. Hopefully, the HFA will find someone strong to continue to do the financial panels at the trade show that **Rick Caro** did so well for so long because they were a great way to meet PE groups who invest in fitness and learn about what they look for and how they see the industry. Talking to operators whose PE deals went bad can be just as if not more educational than talking to operators whose deals went well. If you are considering bringing on a PE partner, ask them about deals they've done that went sour, and try to track down and talk to the operators of those deals to understand what they think went wrong. If they've been investing for 20 years and tell you they've never had a deal go bad, chances are they are conveniently forgetting at least a couple. I would not rule out hiring a psychologist to do some personality profiling of both the PE professionals who will be involved in your company after the deal closes and yourself to estimate how well you will work together because bringing in the wrong partner can be disastrously wealth destroying for you.

Doing a PE Deal - If you are doing a PE deal, you want an attorney who spends most of their time representing clients in securities transactions. Your local attorney who has helped with three PE deals in the last 15 years is probably not who you want representing you because the PE group will have a big city lawyer who sees securities transactions every month and knows exactly what they are doing and asking for when they draft the agreements. Your attorney needs to be as good and as experienced as their attorney. You also want a good investment banker to shop the deal to multiple equity groups whose investment criteria match where your business is at the time, and Rick's financial panels were great for meeting investment bankers, too. Do

not necessarily jump at the first PE group that approaches you because they were introduced to you by someone you admire who made money with the same group several years ago. I've seen that blow up, too.

Attend the Trade Show - Go to the HFA Trade Show every year if you can. Meeting people who can give you independent references if you are thinking about switching operating systems or can help you think through other big changes you might want to make is worth paying for the flight, hotel, transportation and food to attend. A PE professional who invested in a couple of different club chains once told me that he thought most fitness industry CEOs were pathological liars (which we'll assume does not apply to subscribers of *Club Insider*), so while participating in peer roundtables can be incredibly useful, those buddies you see a few times a year might be less honest about something they've gone through than the CEO of a larger chain you meet at the show. More potential references are better. I usually learn something, see something new or meet someone interesting walking the show floor each year. Attending Rick Caro's Financial Panel was always time well spent. You can learn a lot at the trade show by meeting and listening to people who have owned clubs for 30 or more years. They've seen the industry evolve in ways that would have been hard to predict in 1990, have survived several recessions and are often happy to talk.

(Mike Manning has been a CFO, Consultant and Board Member in the health and fitness industry since early 2006 and has worked with club owners and private equity groups who invest in fitness. Manning can be reached at manning@strategicadvicellc.com.)

Group Fitness Music: *The Bride or the Barbecue?*

By: Jeffrey Pinkerton

Music is a strong motivator and should be the heartbeat of the group fitness experience. It has a proven ability to increase enjoyment and improve performance. A great playlist allows people to get lost in the music and helps people disassociate from some of the negative sensations of working out. When music moves from the background to the forefront, it can drive efficiency, improve endurance, create an emotional connection, increase endorphin release and transform a workout into an experience. But, you need the right mix of music to attract maximum members into your group fitness workouts, and there is a big difference between music for the bride and music for the barbecue.

For a bride and groom, every detail of the big day is planned to be perfect, from the venue to the flowers to the colors and coordinating outfits. It's their big day. The bride and groom make countless decisions on what will be and won't be part of their memorable day, music included.

When my wife and I were married 28 years ago, one year after the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, we told the DJ the music that we liked and did not like. In fact, we had a list of songs that were *not* to be played under any circumstances. It didn't matter what the crowd asked for. Even if the guests (mostly fraternity and sorority friends) begged and bribed, there were certain songs we didn't want to hear. During our pre-wedding conversation with the DJ, my wife slowed her speech and lowered

her voice, "We are not joking. If you play *Macarena* at the reception, we will not pay you."

Most group fitness instructors, either unknowingly or intentionally, choose only music they love. And, they don't play music that they don't love, even if it's 1996 and *Macarena* is in its post-Olympics heyday. Building a "bride-only" playlist reduces or even eliminates music variety, and in a group fitness setting, will certainly affect participation. I'm a 50-year-old white male. Imagine if my cycling playlist was only my favorite music! I hope you all like *The Beastie Boys* and *REO Speedwagon*.

On the other hand, imagine you've invited your neighbors over for a backyard barbecue. You know your neighbors
(See *Jeffrey Pinkerton* Page 18)



Jeffrey Pinkerton

...John McCarthy

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in that field did to encourage women to be even more involved in exercise than men, so that's a huge thing.

4. Then, there are actually three phenomena that go together:

■ The first is what your buddy, **Mike Grondahl**, did with *Planet Fitness*. He revolutionized the industry. There is not a club in the world that hasn't been impacted by what Mike did. So, he was a HUGE factor in the evolution of the industry.

■ Then, totally different than Planet Fitness, but just as prolific, was the incredible birth of the thousands and thousands of mini-clubs. The 1,000 to 2,000 square-foot clubs are everywhere up here, and most of them are franchises. But, this means that the little guy CAN get in the business now, and that includes young people in the business that are highly motivated and can be in the industry now because they don't need a whole lot of capital to get in. Plus, they are all doing what they love.

■ Next, there are several guys who have really changed the industry, and I put them all in the same breath: Dale Dibble, Red Lerille, Curt Beusman, Alan Schwartz, Jim Gerber and Bahram Akradi. They caused the re-birth of the family club. Mike doesn't do any of that. The mini-clubs don't do any of that. But, it's people like Dale, Red, Curt, Alan, Jim and Bahram, to name just a few from many, who re-birthed the family clubs with everything from Grandmas to six-year old kids. They are people who made everybody realize that there was real gold in creating family clubs. And, the huge family

clubs are some of the most successful in the industry now.

5. Norm, the guy who proved that execution in clubs is everything is Joe Cirulli. When you go into his clubs, there's nothing different than in 10,000 other clubs, but it's his *execution*. He just does it better than anybody else. Of course, it's not just Joe who's great at execution, but if you want to see execution at the five-star level, go down to Gainesville, Florida and take a look. That's how you do it. The point is... no matter what you're doing... it's **ALL ABOUT EXECUTION!** There is no secret sauce... secret this or secret that... it's **EXECUTION!** And, that's what this business is about. Joe only owns two or three clubs, but he makes more money in those clubs than some people who own 25, or 30 clubs, or more!

C.I. - John, that's a great list of happenings! And, with respect to the low-cost clubs and small mini-club revolutions that are happening, I'd argue with anyone anywhere that low-cost 'starter' clubs work for many people who are out of shape and are too embarrassed to even go into a big family club, or to a big box fitness center. In essence, I believe that these clubs act as *feeder systems* for new member prospects for the family clubs and the big box fitness centers of the world.

John, we're at the end of the interview now, but I want to share with our readers about what you have on the horizon... What's in store for Big John McCarthy? **JMC** - Well, you know, Norm, I enjoy what I'm doing, and I'm still in reasonably good health. So, I just take it one day at a time, and I enjoy it as much as I can. I try to stay in touch with my buddies. I play a little golf. I go to a health club almost every day. And,

I stay close to my wife and my kids. It's very simple. Very simple.

C.I. - Well, Big John, it's simple, and it's great. Because if anybody in the world deserves the opportunity that you've got in life, because you know of course, with everything with exercise that you've been involved in during your life so far, there is no reason why you should not live to be 100!

In closing, Big John, I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for all that you've done for all of us in this

wonderful industry that we all share and participate in. Words will not adequately express the depth of the appreciation from thousands and thousands of us who've known and worked with you during the past 34 years. So, congratulations to you for your *Club Industry Lifetime Achievement Award*, and to the *Club Industry* folks who so wisely decided to present you with the honor in Chicago on October 23, 2014.

Thank You and God Bless you and your Family, Big John!

Club Insider Seeks Contributing Authors for 2026!

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...Jeffrey Pinkerton

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represent a broad spectrum of ages and ethnicities, but you don't know them well enough to know their musical tastes. So, if you want to build a great playlist, you'll need to make sure that the night's music has something for everyone. Yes, maybe even songs that are not your personal favorites.

For an inclusive, broad-reaching group fitness experience, your instructors need to stretch outside of their personal preferences and build playlists that appeal to a wide audience of members: different artists, different genres and different decades. One reason you may be struggling to get younger people into group fitness? There isn't any music on the playlist for them.

To make unbiased music selection even more complicated, research suggests that most of our musical tastes are formed in our teens and throughout our early 20s and 30s. After that point (one study says it's around the age of 23), our musical tastes become mostly locked-in... for life. Certainly, there are some exceptions to this, and of course, we'd all love to think that we are well-rounded, but I guarantee

you are not as musically open-minded as you think.

Don't believe me? As we approach the end of the year, find a 20- or 30-something on your team and compare your *Spotify Year in Review* with theirs. Sure, you both listened to *Taylor Swift's* new album... after that, you might be hard-pressed to find some common favorites.

How important is the music? Have you heard of social motion? It's a term that the authors of *Blue Zones* coined to describe a phenomenon that occurs when people move together, synchronized in time to music. This music and movement superpower can elevate experiences and even bring people together in a closer way. As *Cohen and Davis* describe, "Social motion comes in many forms across cultures and contexts – exercise, dance, ritual, labor and play – but is universally characterized by two components: coordinated movement and physical exertion."

The difference between motion and "social motion" is the difference between cheering at a sporting event (yes, fun and social), versus full-stadium chanting at a sporting event, which can raise the heart rate and hairs on your neck. It is the difference between dancing at a *Coldplay* concert and jumping in unison

with thousands of others at a *Coldplay* concert. And, it's the difference between sheepishly heading out onto the dance floor at a wedding and joining the coordinated line dance at a wedding (guilty as charged).

Carefully curating your playlist is one of the best ways to make sure the experience being delivered is as inclusive as possible – for women, men, all ages. This is true for workouts and for weddings. My son and his high school sweetheart recently got married. In addition to being meticulous, detail-oriented people, they are also kind and thoughtful. They wanted to make sure everyone had an amazing night celebrating with them, and preferably, as many people on the dance floor as possible. They spent weeks building the perfect playlist, and it was a hit: *ABBA, Flo Rida, Marvin Gaye, Taylor Swift, Bee Gees, Sabrina Carpenter, Pitbull, Beyoncé, Zac Brown, Britney Spears, Soulja Boy, John Denver* and *Fergie*, just to name a few. It

was a night... and a playlist to remember.

■ ■ ■

Well-rounded and open-minded... does that describe your and your instructors' approach to workout music? With MOSSA, you don't have to spend weeks curating the perfect playlist because we do it for you. Then, we sound design it and test it around the world, to give you workouts driven by musical variety and energy that can fill your room like a busy dancefloor. If you'd like to hear it, believe it, maximize participation with it – and get Macarena out of your head (sorry!) – reach out to me at jeffreypinkerton@mossa.net.

(Jeffrey Pinkerton is the Business Development Manager for MOSSA. Jeffrey can be reached by phone at 770-989-4737 or email at jeffreypinkerton@mossa.net.)

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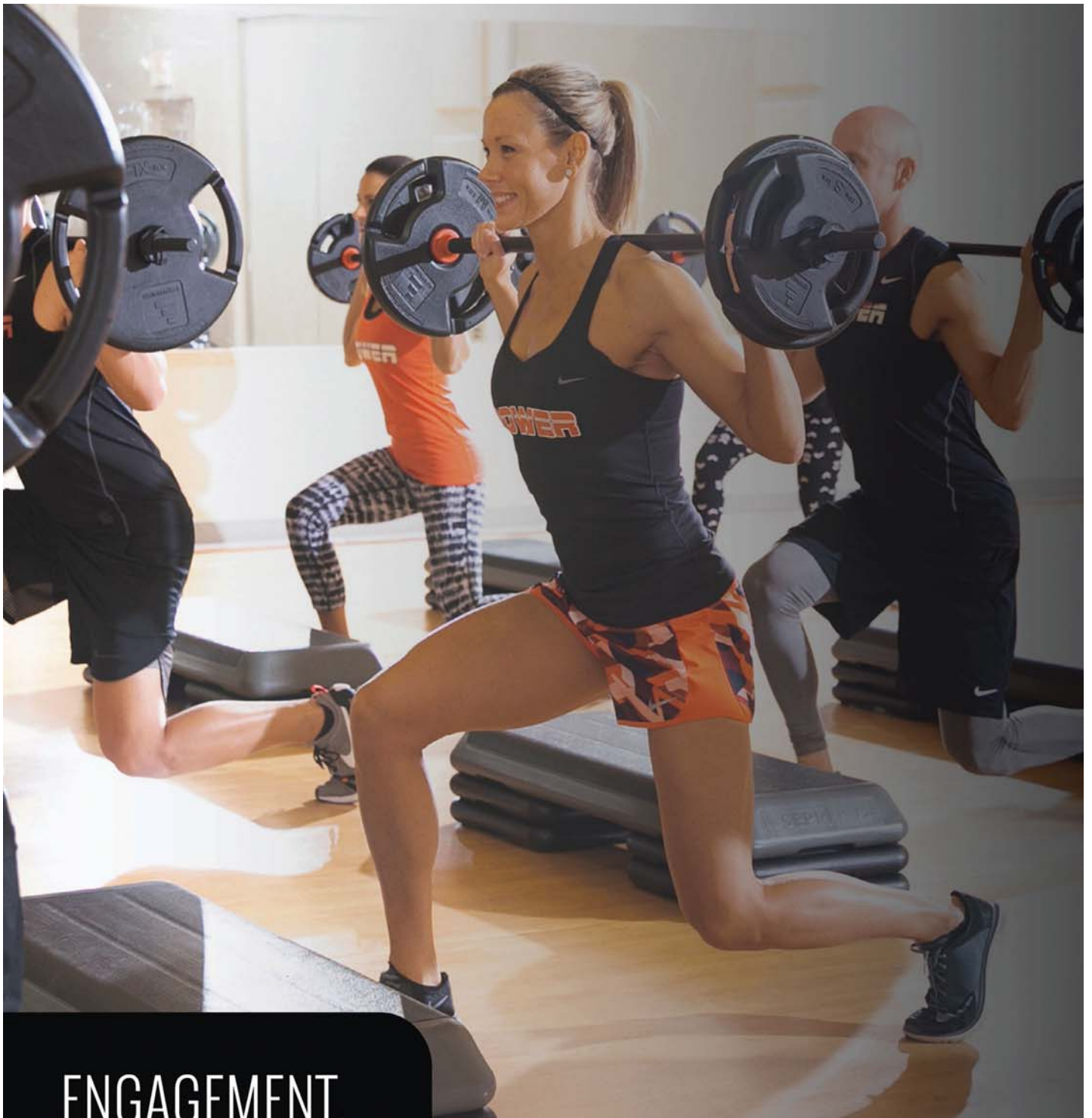
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