

LEAVING THE PONY

EXPRESS BEHIND



Collegiality and education are the watchwords for the year for incoming CMAA President Kevin E. Carroll, CCM, CCE

By J. Eric Eckard



CMAA President Kevin E. Carroll, CCM, CCE with Lexington Executive Chef David Ray.

Kevin E. Carroll, CCM, CCE, got his start in the club industry in the 1970s, washing dishes at St. Joseph Country Club in St. Joseph, MO, where "only two things ever really happened. The Pony Express was started there, and Jesse James was killed there. And nothing's happened since."

Perhaps St. Joe's mark on history has remained unchanged, but the club industry has evolved dramatically over the years. Carroll says the biggest transformation lies in the club member. And thriving clubs are latching on to the changing mentality of today's members.

What makes the very successful clubs different from the ones that aren't as successful? What are they doing differently?

A Well, you talk about thinking outside the box. Families are a bigger part of clubs than they've ever been before. It's offering not only different products and services than maybe traditional clubs have offered before, more than just golf, more than just tennis, or more than just dining. There are clubs that started way before this recession to make themselves valuable to their members, establishing things like children's camps and family nights out at the club and including the total family. It's not just

the old stereotype, where Dad went to the club Saturday morning, and the family wouldn't see him again until Saturday night because he spent the day at the club. That's no longer the case. We compete as much for members' time as we do for their money, and families today tend to spend more and more time together. The family is a much different unit than it used to be. The clubs that have realized that and have done something to enhance that have probably been the ones to continue to do well.

What do you see as clubs' biggest challenges today?

A: I think clubs are facing the same things that any business or industry is facing, and overall that's the economy: struggling to provide more with fewer resources, finding a way to be relevant to the members, finding a way to be indispensable, providing that indispensable product or service that members can't do without, so that they continue to be members of the club.

Can you give me any specific examples?

A: The key thing for CMAA is education and continuing education. Trying to take the best ideas and the best concepts from around the country and teaching those things to the rest of the membership. We have more than 22 weeks of education throughout the year, on various college campuses and in various locations, and conferences, seminars, and meetings



Carroll with Loxahatchee member, Tom Szabo and Jan Olson from Peacock & Lewis.

around the country, so our big push is for education. On top of that, we provide additional resources that help clubs save money, such as a new venture we're entering into now, working with clubs on risk management: on looking at their workers' compensation insurance coverages, their directors' and officers' insurance. We just established a risk-management department, actually through CMAA, at which managers can find out more information about the entire insurance industry and become more familiar with products and services that are offered. Again, it's an educational process, of teaching managers about the insurance industry so that they can become better consumers.

The majority of clubs in the organization are golf-related, but is there a common theme in advice and resources that you can provide managers that works across the board, for a golf club or a yacht club?

A: Sure. Even though more than 80 percent of our members manage or work at golf-related industries, we still have close to 20 percent who operate facilities that do not have golf courses. The common thread among all club managers is leadership. Most of them have food and beverage. But I think a lot of it has to do with leadership—governance, team building, managing teams, hiring right, staff training—bringing all those components together to run a really successful business.

What do you hope to accomplish during your tenure as president of the Association?

A: I hope to continue to grow our membership ranks within the Association. I think we have a great opportunity to bring in more members, not only from the clubs that we already represent but from facilities that are out there in which we don't have representation.

Do you have proposals to do that?

A: Our chapter member-services committee put together a membership program that we initiated this past year, and they are working on that. I think it continues to be, you know, banging the drum, getting the word out there and continuing to educate our members on how important it is, how important the growth of our association is, so that we can continue to offer quality education and quality services.



Carroll with Brian Idle of Peacock & Lewis.

What would you say to a manager of a club who has never heard of CMAA, or a manager who has but feels maybe Association membership is not worth the cost?

A: I've heard this from managers who have been there and go back to their boards and say, They can go to one meeting, one seminar, one conference, and come back with one idea that will more than generate the fee for belonging to the Association, by way of someone else's idea or someone else's revenue-enhancing idea. There are so many ways in which you can justify membership in the Association. I think our website alone is worth the price of admission, because we have tens of thousands of pages of information—everything from strategic planning to management to forms and letters. And there are so many things for the lazy manager, to simply go on there and download something, drop their club's name in it, and they've got it done. Again, there's just so much out there.

Sounds like membership pays for itself.

A: It usually pays for itself. We have some of the brightest people in the hospitality business, for sure. The thing our members enjoy most at CMAA is the networking that goes on. And the interesting thing about our business that I think is different from the hotel industry or many other industries is that we share all the information that we have. Individual managers are willing to share nearly everything they have. That's because we really don't compete directly with one another. There may be a club around the corner, down the street, or across town, and there may be a little competition on who gets the member, but each club is pretty unique, and each club has its own distinct feel, its own distinct membership characteristics. So, you really don't compete all that much. So, you want to help everybody else. They say the rising tide lifts all boats, which is very, very true in the club business. The better one club is, then the next club wants to be that much better, and we continue to share ideas.

At our national conference, we have something called the Idea Fair, and we've got, I don't know, 15 different categories of things. Everything from energy-saving and maintenance ideas, to golf course maintenance ideas, to your best food and beverage ideas, to the best wine list. Managers from all over

the country enter this Idea Fair, and you can spend hours and hours just walking these rows of tables, in which these poster boards are set up, and taking notes. That alone, if you go to the national conference, you can not only come back with one idea, but with 25 or 30 ideas, and come back to your staff and say, Here, implement this or research this, or here's this guy's business card that did this, give them a call and find out how to implement it here. You talk about how some-


thing pays for itself; there's just nothing better. You're taking the best ideas from the best clubs around the country. You take the idea, put your name on it, and call it your own. We just know that; that's what we do. ☺

About the author:

J. Eric Eckard's work has appeared in the Ritz-Carlton magazine and Virginia Golfer. When he's not in front of his computer, he's trying to hit as many fairways and greens as possible.

FUN FACTS

About the New CMAA President



Kevin E. Carroll, CCM, CCE:
Incoming president of the Club Managers Association of America.

Present position: General manager and chief operating officer of the Loxahatchee Club in Jupiter, FL, since 2004.

First club job: Dishwasher, in 1974.

First general manager's job: Alumni club at the University of Kansas.

Most interesting schooling: Attended the Culinary Institute of America.

Most memorable sporting experience: Diving with whale sharks in Belize.

Least memorable sporting experience: On September 11, 2001, the first practice round for the 2001 World Golf Championship was held at his club in St. Louis. The tournament was canceled because of the terror attacks.