

Norm Cates'

CLUB INSIDER

CELEBRATING 28 YEARS OF TRUST

Norm Cates, Jr. *75 Years and Still Kickin'!*



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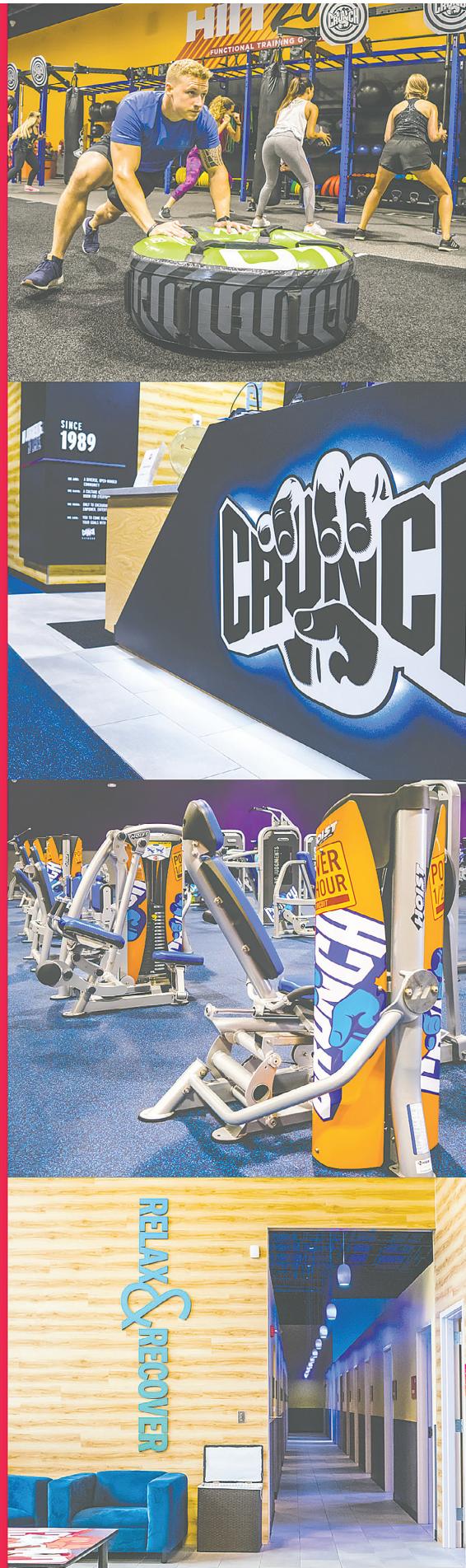


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CLUB INSIDER

CELEBRATING 28 YEARS OF TRUST

Norm Cates, Jr. 75 Years and Still Kickin'!

By: Justin Cates

One's life is the aggregate of the experiences, lessons and people met and affected along the way. And, a life well lived is one that fills each of these categories with a plethora of stories and shared experiences. The life of *my Dad, Norm Cates, Jr.*, is one that has been well lived, and I am thankful it is one that continues on.

In honor of his **75th Birthday** on **January 17, 2021**, this month's cover story will share his life to date with you. Now, 75 years in, his experiences, lessons and the people he has met and affected along the way can fill volumes, so I am going to do my best to share as much of it with you as I can in this limited space.

Sharing this milestone in my Dad's life is a top honor in my own life, so I thank you for the time you spend reading this story. Though it is long and thorough, I can promise you it is entertaining, informational and beneficial. So, once again, I invite you to grab two or three of your favorite beverages, sit in your favorite comfortable spot, and enjoy the following in-depth interview with Norm Cates, Jr.

An Interview With Norm Cates, Jr.

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

Norm Cates (NC) - I was born in *Minden, Louisiana*. My Mom and Dad, **Leota and Norm Cates, Sr.**, were visiting my Mom's parents in the small town of *Springhill, Louisiana* when I decided to arrive into this world. Because Springhill was a tiny town with a population of 5,600 and *no hospital* (but it was home of **John David Crow**, the 1957 *Heisman Trophy Award Winner* who played

for Texas A&M), my Dad had to drive Mom 30 miles to the closest hospital, which was in Minden, and that's where I was blessed to enter this beautiful world.

I chuckle at the second part of the question: *'Where did I grow up?'* That's kind of a long answer because my Dad was in the Air Force... So, *hold onto your hats, folks!* After being born in Louisiana, but having never lived there, by the time I was a Senior in high school, my family and I had lived in **nine cities**, including one in a foreign country... Japan.

Nine Cities

City #1 - After being born in Louisiana, I lived in *Texarkana, Arkansas* for three years. There, my Dad was a U.S. Air Force Recruiter.

City #2 - When I was three years old, we moved to *Colorado, Springs, Colorado* and lived there until I was six.

City #3 - At age six, we moved to *Okinawa, Japan*, and I went into the 1st grade. I have a very distinct memory from that time, even though it was 69 years ago, and it is in my mind as if it was *yesterday!*

On Okinawa, the home we lived in was a huge metal pipe cut in half. It was mounted to the ground with a concrete foundation, and it had doors installed in the front and the back. This dwelling was called a 'Quonset Hut.' We lived in this Quonset Hut for one year, and I also went to school in Quonset Huts after a 10-mile bus ride to the school. Well, a typhoon hit Okinawa with 140-mile per hour winds, and it lasted several hours from start to finish! The Quonset Hut we lived in had an oil burning stove/furnace for the heater, and this stove had a metal pipe smokestack sticking through the roof. On top



The Cates Family Through The Years

of that pipe was a metal cone intended to keep the rain out, and it was attached with three wires. Well, the wind from the typhoon made short order of that metal cone! One of the three wires attaching the cone to the top of the smokestack broke loose, while the other two wires stayed attached. So, for several hours, while that storm was pummeling Okinawa, my Mom, Dad and Brother, the late **Allen Gene** (my other younger Brother, **David**, was not born yet), were terrorized by this metal cone making a huge clangy noise while pounding the roof of our Quonset Hut! Throughout the entire night, the incessant noise made us think our home might just blow away at any

moment... *with us in it!*

Trust me when I say that, because of that experience at such a young age, I know what scared is. Heck, I've been piloting jet airplanes that were on fire. For sure, that was scary, but this event, for a six-year-old, spending two or more hours not being sure if you're going to live or die is still one of the scariest things I can ever remember in my life. And, as I said, although that was 69 years ago, in my mind today, it was like it happened yesterday!

City #4 - After living in Okinawa for a year, (See **Norm Cates, Jr.** Page 8)

Inside the Insider: Edition #325

- Panic - Pain - Suffering - Optimization - Opportunity - **By:** Bill McBride
- Ten Things Every Fitness Center Operator Must Do Moving Into 2021 - **By:** Bonnie Patrick Mattalian
- New Lessons in Design Learned From the Pandemic - **By:** Bruce Carter
- IRS Makes it Easier to Set Up Payment Agreements; Offers Other Relief - **By:** Kristen Deazeley
- "Non-Essential" Never Again - Part III - **By:** Eric Durak, MSc
- Your Menu of Services: A Recommendation About Recommendations - **By:** Jeffrey Pinkerton
- And, of Course, **Norm's Notes**

Norm's Notes

■Hello Everybody! This is your Club Insider Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993 checking in with our 325th monthly edition of *Club Insider!* WOW! We made it to the New Year of 2021, and it couldn't have happened sooner! Thank GOD we've put the "2020 Year from Hell" squarely behind us. Let's ALL PRAY to GOD that this horror show, the pandemic disaster of 2020, we've all been living through can somehow be stymied by the citizens of this great country through the combination of masks, social distancing and vaccinations. As we enter our 28th year of publishing *Club Insider*, I must again emphasize that our monthly production has only been made possible because of your support as a reader and because you are one who reaches out to and does business with our wonderful and very dedicated group of Club Insider Advertisers. Were it not for YOU and THEM, *Club Insider* would not be in front of you right now. So, thank you, and may 2021 be a happier, healthier New Year!

■Is America a GREAT COUNTRY, or what!? When I think of how our great

country is struggling to survive this pandemic disaster, a struggle I believe history will someday show was the most difficult time in our country's history, it brought tears to my eyes in the early days of this debacle. But, like you, we battened down the hatches, and we are thankful for *Club Insider* to be in a position to survive the COVID-19 pandemic! Let me state that, though it hasn't been easy for us, we are aware of how much more difficult it has been for the club owners in this country and around the world! But, one thing is for sure... PEOPLE WHO REALLY CARE... FIGHT HARDER than THOSE WHO DON'T! And, I know YOU CARE. And, when I tell you JUSTIN and I CARE ABOUT YOU ALL, you can take that to the BANK! I want to hear from you any time you might feel like sharing any aspect of your battles with me. My phone number is (770) 635 - 7578, and my email address is Norm@clubinsideronline.com.

■I'm extremely SAD to report to you that industry veteran and my good friend, STEPHEN THARRETT, passed away on Tuesday, December 22, 2020.

Stephen died of complications from a heart attack he suffered on December 20th. **MAY STEPHEN THARRETT REST IN PEACE.** Stephen Tharrett, was one of the greatest and most dedicated teachers and educators in the history of our industry. Stephen's vast depth of knowledge and the vast breadth of his contributions to our industry, an industry that he loved so very much, is rivaled by a very tiny few in our industry. Stephen was partners with MARK WILLIAMSON in a company they called CLUBINTEL. When I say these guys, Stephen Tharrett and Mark Williamson, working together in their multiple approaches towards industry education and teaching, were true TITANS in our industry, I'm not exaggerating.

JOHN MCCARTHY, former 25-year Executive Director of IHRSA, had this to say about Stephen: "I first met Steve when he was the Senior Vice President of ClubCorp where he was instrumental in bringing all of ClubCorp's athletic and fitness clubs, then about 40 clubs, into IHRSA. Shortly thereafter, he joined IHRSA's Board of Directors, from which he was ultimately elected to serve as IHRSA's President. Steve was hugely instrumental in leading IHRSA's global outreach, especially after he had begun his tenure as CEO of the Russian Fitness Group, which involved him living and working in Russia for several years. A man of prodigious productivity, he found time to write ten books on the fitness industry, some of which are used as textbooks at over 30 major colleges and universities. He spoke to large audiences at numerous IHRSA and other conventions both in the U.S. and abroad. Steve was admired by all for his friendliness, as well as for his warmth, generosity and humility. He has left us far, far too soon..."



Norm Cates



The Late Stephen Tharrett

Justin and I wish to extend our very sincere condolences to Stephen's (See Norm's Notes Page 7)

Thanks and Appreciation

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

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

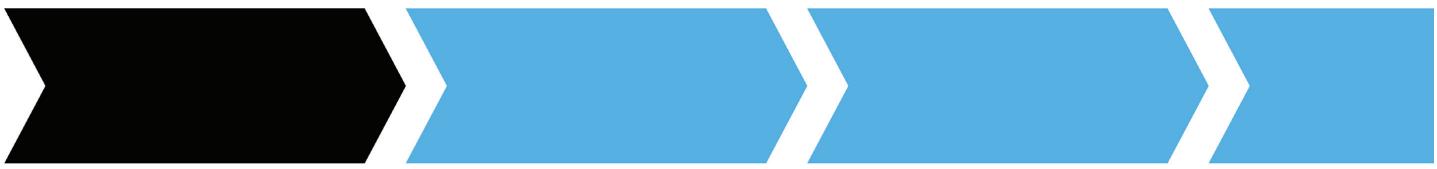
Last, but surely not least, this writer who refused to fear failure when many told him he didn't have a chance of surviving the publishing business for even a year did survive. And, he would like to give his sincere Thanks and Appreciation to the power that made that survival happen: God.

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

Norm Cates, Jr.



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Panic - Pain - Suffering - Optimization - Opportunity

By: Bill McBride

"No one questions the essentiality of fitness, but the essentialness of fitness centers has been questioned, doubted and challenged."



Hello Industry Colleagues. We are all colleagues on the same team in so many ways. We've all been in this pandemic together dealing with very similar realities, perceptions and challenges. One might say that everyone in the world has had to go through this together. But, just like other industries, ours has its particular nuances.

As an industry, we have fought most government regulation and licensure. We have catered to the top income and education levels of society. We have taken pride in our missions of helping others reach levels of beauty, physicality, performance, fitness, health and wellness. We know fitness is essential. No one questions the essentiality of fitness, but governments and press have questioned the essentialness of fitness centers. It seems odd from our perspective, but it seems others/outsiders view us as social recreation or said another way: *non-essential*. I suggest we welcome some higher standards of care that we are known for throughout the world on what we provide and that we do a better job with inclusion.

So, what happened?

The world was hit with a pandemic. Everywhere people gathered became an issue, except those essential businesses... not us! We were shut down with very little scientific proof of our services being problematic. In reality, we were/are part of the prevention/cure. Fitness increases health and wellbeing with a positive immunity response. But, we still got hammered.

We had *Business Interruption Insurance (BI)* for unforeseeable events, but the insurance industry exempts pandemics, and it would most likely bankrupt our insurance industry without government backstopping. So, that was a non-starter and actually understandable, because if full coverage was provided, we would not be able to have insurance going forward based on a bankrupt insurance industry or premiums so high none of us could afford them.

So, with no BI. insurance coverage, we had to close. The government gave us and everyone PPP money... a few months of payroll and a few other expenses. But, the pandemic has raged on for ten months and counting.

To date, IHRSA has reported 15% of private clubs and studios closed permanently. My guess is it will be another 15 - 20%, if not more. So, we are facing a possible 30% or more contraction in supply. This could prove to be a windfall for those that survive. But, it's potentially economic

life ruining for those with personal guarantees on their small businesses and relying on their small business income.

Many, if not most, of the big players have filed *Chapter 11 Bankruptcy* for protection and restructuring. Some operators have filed *Chapter 7* and closed permanently. Many will come out stronger than before the pandemic based on these legal opportunities. Some were challenged prior. Consumers won't lose faith as all are doing it, and they understand the challenges businesses are facing. This is not necessarily a bad thing because it ensures the survivability of many brands we love and need in our industry.

Many consumers report that, other than extended family gatherings, their health club experiences are what they miss mostly.

From a retail perspective, the fitness industry has never been better. People didn't give up on fitness, they self-solved for their problem. They bought up all the retail weights, bikes, roller blades, home equipment, Pelotons, Soul Cycles, etc. Our people didn't give up on fitness, they found alternatives. This is actually very good news. As people want/need fitness activity, and we know they need socialization and social experiences. Our consumers will return. The timing may be less than ideal, but they will return, and with the unfortunate reduction in supply, many will profit from the rebound in demand.

Our industry has stepped up as well, if not better, than any other in safety, cleaning and pandemic preventative measures. I'm honored to be involved in IHRSA's *Standards Headlight Committee*. IHRSA launched the *Active & Safe Commitment* with more standards to come (bit.ly/clubinsider118). I encourage all clubs to make the commitment.

Blair McHaney and *MXM*, working with IHRSA, has provided significant data on the check-ins to virus ratios of clubs in the U.S., and it is a very low (bit.ly/clubinsider119). They have also worked with the *Oregon Consulting Group on Research*, showing the low risk our industry poses (bit.ly/clubinsider120).

We are now seeing more and more positive press about the safety of health clubs. The *Governors of New York* and *New Jersey* have recently stated our safely record publicly. So, let's dive in:

Panic: We were shut down abruptly and arbitrarily. We had no insurance and no plan for what is next. Almost everything was out of our control. We all made independent decisions on keeping staff on, furloughing staff, charging members, freezing memberships, etc. We had no playbook for this one. It was a balancing act of values, projections, financial resources and uncertainty.

Pain: We had to furlough or lay off the majority of our staff. Those remaining may have been reduced in compensation with no bonus opportunities. We had to do

our best with our staff during this horrific time, assisting them with navigating unemployment and benefits.

We had to communicate with our members the need for their loyalty to ensure our survival but with compassion about their safety and their own personal financial circumstances.

We had to approach our landlords about concessions on rent knowing they, too, have mortgages on the property. We had to approach our lenders and vendors knowing they, too, have the same challenges we face.

Suffering: It didn't end at the end of the PPP forgiveness period. It didn't end; it got worse. There was no rhyme or reason to the regulations and ordinances preventing us from fully opening, even with our best precautions. Some chose a very risky position of opening or not closing again, even with local or state mandates. This risks a lack of insurance coverage and industry goodwill, but it was/is a matter of survival for many. Many are also dealing with Red/Blue State and local enforcement strictness. Are fines and wrist slapping worth the lost revenue and services provided to the community?

These are hard decisions based on the science, facts and necessity of survival, as well as the fact that we are part of the solution to health and wellbeing, and in my view, as essential as any other business if not more so. But, for those that open against regulations, be warned you may have negative outcomes: fines, closure, loss of your business license, injury claims not covered by insurance, loss of industry goodwill that affects all of us, etc. If you stay open or re-open without local and state approval, please realize your macro risks.

People are suffering with weight gain, inactivity, isolation, depression, alcohol, opioid and other drug use, not to mention increased incidence of suicide. People are suffering.

Optimization:

■ We reviewed every transaction on our General Ledgers. We eliminated all that we could.

■ We reduced staff and compensation.

■ We applied for stimulus funding.

■ We asked our lenders for concessions.

■ We did forecasts and projections.

■ We thought about survival and did all we could do in every way.

■ We cut all that we could.

■ We looked at all potential revenue business lines to enhance.

■ We looked at the circumstance from a point of innovation and a re-set to redo everything we have been thinking about if we were to start over: towels, services, etc.

■ We made cleaning and safety a core competency.

■ We did videos on what members could expect.



Bill McBride

■ We shared our proactivity on all media vehicles.

Opportunity:

■ Vaccines are here and will become more and more available.

■ There are more stimulus funds potentially becoming available.

■ There will be market opportunities based on the industry's contraction.

■ We have an opportunity to figure out the unmet needs in our markets.

■ Those with a clean balance sheet, credit and reserves will have tremendous opportunities.

■ We figured out the enhanced importance for Virtual/Digital/Wearable Programming.

■ We learned the value of video connection. Video connections can be stronger than live, based on comfort levels and self-reservation.

■ We mastered member scheduling for services and visits in many cases.

■ We figured out the benefits and opportunities of outdoor spaces on our properties.

■ We learned the benefits of designated Personal Training or Personal Space "Pods/Areas."

■ We learned how to highlight the health and wellness benefits of exercise and activity.

■ We learned to present value not just price and promotion only.



It goes without saying that we have all suffered, some more than others. In that, we have all been bonded because we all experienced this together. Within our industry, for those who survived, opportunities for future growth will be abound. And, for those who were forced to close, it doesn't have to be over for you either. As the industry rebounds and rebuilds, there will also be opportunities for a new start. For all, we will have the hindsight of 20/20, and from those lessons, things will be done differently in the future.

(Bill McBride is the Founder of BMC3. He can be reached at BillMcBride@bmc3.com.)

...Norm's Notes

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family, and to his business partner and friend, **Mark Williamson**. Sadly, this news arrived at the last moment before our deadline for this edition, limiting our coverage, but we will be producing a complete story for our *February 2021 Edition of Club Insider*. **Stay Tuned, folks!**

■ **Welcome Back** to **Bonnie Patrick-Mattalian** as she rejoins the *Club Insider Contributing Author Team*. Check out her new Article, *Ten Things Every Fitness Center Operator Must Do Moving Into 2021*, on **Page #18**.

■ Also, **Welcome Back** to **Muscle Sport Productions, TG - The Gym**, as they rejoin the *Club Insider Advertising Team*. Their **Online Ads** can be seen on our website and in our weekly and monthly eblasts. To learn more, go to www.thegymvista.com.

■ Folks, I write this **Norm's Note** to give credit and very sincere Thanks and Appreciation to **DEREK BARTON**, one of our highly esteemed *Club Insider Contributing Authors*, for causing this month's special Cover Story celebrating my **75th birthday** to happen. So, in Derek's honor and to recognize him for what Justin and I have concluded was a very helpful and good idea, I'm going to ask all of you for your participation in my **75th Birthday Celebration** by reading **ALL** of this **Special Cover Story**. I emphasize **READ ALL OF I**, because within these pages are **75 years of life experience** and **47 years of professional experience in our wonderful industry** that we've chronicled, not just for the purpose of celebrating my birthday, but to **HELP YOU** by providing lessons from my experiences so you can use them in your club business endeavors. I've learned a lot over the years, sometimes the hard way, so if I can help prevent any of you from having to learn something the hard way, the purpose of this month's cover story will have been fulfilled! So, I invite you to thoroughly read this **12,000-word cover story** because it is laced with experiences and happenings throughout my life that will both entertain you *and* give you ideas that can be helpful to your club business. It begins on **Page #3**.

■ **Almost 40 years ago**, I was honored to be the **1st President of IHRSA**. I'm very proud and honored to be able to say that, but just in case you don't read all of this month's interesting and educational cover story, in the **Note** that follows, I want to explain exactly how I became the **1st President**, so the facts are clear in our industry as we move forward.

The **REAL REASON IHRSA EXISTS** is because of the vision of a brilliant guy named **RICK CARO**, whose name is now a household word in our industry. And, rightfully so. **IHRSA was Rick's "Brainchild."** The definition of brainchild is: *An idea or invention which is considered to be a particular person's creation*. This "particular person" was the one-and-only Rick Caro, and his "creation"

was called **IRSA** in the beginning, and it's now called **IHRSA**.

I was involved from **Day One with the creation and launch of IHRSA**. In fact, Rick and I spent many hours on the phone calling back and forth between **New York City** and **Atlanta** working on the idea before we even launched it. And, as I mentioned, I was **IHRSA's 1st President**; however, that *only happened* because, as we were creating the Association, Rick was very busy dealing with a Northeastern group of eight indoor tennis clubs in which he was a part.

So, Rick felt it was prudent to have someone else be the **first President**, and he nominated me to be the **first President of the first Board of Directors**. The Board then elected me, so my thanks goes to all of those Board Members! **Needless to say, I was extremely honored to be the 1st President of IRS (now IHRSA) in 1981!**

Let me close this Note by saying it's important that you know Rick is the **single best Club Consultant on Earth**. So, if you ever need help for your club business, you can take this to the bank folks: **Hiring Rick will be a WISE investment**.

■ **BILL MCBRIDE** of **Team Active**, and a **Club Insider Contributing Author** was honored on December 22nd by **The Healthcare Technology Report** when they selected Bill to be among **The TOP 25 Consumer Health/Tech Executives of 2020!** **Congratulations Bill!** Also, check out Bill's Article, entitled, **PANIC - PAIN - SUFFERING - OPTIMIZATION - OPPORTUNITY**, on the Opposite Page.

■ Our friends at **IHRSA's Club Business International (CBI)** have named a new **Editor-in-Chief**. **JIM SCHMALTZ** has assumed the role effective with their **January 2021 Edition**.

■ **Happy Birthday** to my great friend for close to 57 years now, **ROBERT "QUAIL" WHITE**! Also, check out Quail's comments in this month's cover story on **Page #10**.

■ **Happy Birthday** to **Club Insider Publisher**, and my Son, **JUSTIN CATES**, as he turns **36** on **January 18th**! **Thanks for all you do, Justin!**

■ Given the length of this month's Cover Story on yours truly, I'm going to cut short this month's Norm's Notes here. As I sign off, Justin and I want to wish you a **Happier, Healthier New Year** and **Thank You** for reading *Club Insider* and for supporting our valuable Advertisers!

■ **Are you a Paid Subscriber?** *Club Insider* is a **Paid Subscription-based Publication**. If the words **"PROMOTIONAL COPY"** appear above your name and address on the cover of this month's edition, you are not a **Paid Subscriber**, so you are not enjoying the **full benefits of a Paid Subscription to Club Insider**, which includes new print and online editions and online access to all **27 years of Club Insider's monthly editions**. So, **don't delay**, subscribe today for just **\$89** for one year, **\$149** for two years or **\$10 a month** by going to www.clubinsideronline.com/subscribe.

■ **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. God bless our EMTs, first responders, nurses, doctors, lab technicians and anyone who is helping make Coronavirus a thing of the past. You and your families are our warriors. Finally, God bless you, your family, your club(s) and your members. God Bless America! Laus Deo!**

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



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...Norm Cates, Jr.

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our next stop was *New Castle, Delaware*. We lived there for three years where I went through the 2nd, 3rd and 4th grades.

City #5 - Fast forward three years, and the next stop for the Cates family was... drumroll... lovely *Virginia Beach, Virginia*! Like Okinawa, we only lived there one year while my Dad worked on jet engines on the aircraft carriers at the several U.S. Navy Ports in the Norfolk, Virginia area. I attended the 5th grade there, but my only real memory is that is where I started my first business... at age 11. Virginia Beach was a popular resort town located right on the Atlantic Ocean, so my first business was *catching and selling live turtles*. We lived one block away from a horseshoe-shaped lake where I would go with my net to catch a lot of turtles. They were about the size of two silver dollars, so they were not very big. Then, once I had 15 or 20 turtles in my bucket, I would ride my bike over to the beach and sell them to the local souvenir gift shops on Virginia Beach, which was only about a mile from our home. Following the sale, the souvenir shop owners would have 'Virginia Beach' painted on the back of the little turtles prior to resale. So, that's how, 67 years ago, I started my first business.

City #6 - Next, my Dad was based at *Seymour Johnson Air Force Base* in *Goldsboro, North Carolina*. There, I enjoyed the 6th, 7th and 8th grades. The important event that happened in Goldsboro was that I started playing *organized football* in the 6th grade. Before that, I had played pickup tackle football games with other kids. We played without any pads or helmets at all, so that was probably a terrible idea (laughing), but what the hell, I'm still kicking and lived to talk about it. But, seriously, *becoming a football player was the most important thing I've ever done in my life!* (more on that later)

City #7 - Next stop... *Tampa, Florida*! And, as it turned out, we only lived there for **TWO WEEKS!** The Summer before my 9th grade school year, my Dad was transferred to *MacDill Air Force* in *Tampa, Florida*. We had just moved into a nice home my Dad had found for us. And, even though it was back in 1959, I can remember the following incident and the precise moment and conversation I had with my Dad. I was in our new home sitting on the living room floor unpacking the *Encyclopedia of Britannica* books my Dad had kindly purchased for my Brother, Allen, and me. Suddenly, Dad walked into the house, and he was not smiling or happy at all like he usually always was when he would come home. (My Dad was a very happy man, so to ever see him frown was quite unusual.) He was obviously disturbed about something, which at that moment, was unknown to my Mom, my Brother and me. Dad said to me, 'Chip (my nickname), you need to stop unpacking those books because I have been transferred to *Tyndall Air Force Base* in *Panama City, Florida*!' So, our family started re-packing, and we immediately moved to Panama City, Florida, one of the most beautiful places on Earth! *Never a DULL MOMENT for our family!*

City #8 - 'Take 2' in the great State of Florida, *Panama City* here we come! Yahoo! So, here

I was about to move to another new town, my 8th, and another new school, *Jinks Junior High School*, where I would have to meet and get to know another whole new group of people. I would also have to get to know new teachers, football coaches, etc. Since this was the Summer before my 9th grade of school, it was also time for me to go out for the 9th grade football team. This was where *MY LIFE TRULY BEGAN* because of two very lifechanging events that took place there:

1. I got a morning newspaper route delivering the *Jacksonville Times Union Newspaper*. Little did I know then, as a 14-year-old kid that, *40 years later, starting at age 54 in 1993*, I would become a newspaper Owner and Publisher! My Dad bought me a *Cruisair Motor Scooter* to run my 5AM newspaper route. I pledged to repay him for that purchase, and I was determined to somehow do that!

2. Because of my early bird morning newspaper business income needing to increase, I went out and found another newspaper delivery job. *This was an afternoon newspaper delivery route, which would more than double my income*. Ironically, I had made the 9th grade football team as a starting linebacker and an offensive guard, so I discussed this decision with my Dad. After listening to me, he said, 'Well, Chip, this is your life, and you're going to live it. So, I'm going to leave the decision about quitting football so you can focus on your newspaper business up to you.' Foolishly, *I now realize*, I made the decision to pursue business instead of football!

The next day, I went to see my football coach and told him I was leaving football to make money. *NOT SO FAST, MY FRIEND!!!* Coach was very disturbed by that decision, and he flatly said to me he thought I was making a big mistake because *he believed I had special talent as a football player*. In his experienced view, *I very possibly could be able to earn a full football scholarship* that would pay for my entire college education, including all of my tuition, dorm room, food, books and other incidental things I needed. So, my coach immediately asked me for my home phone number and street address, because he wanted to call my Dad to set

up a time to come and talk to all of us about this decision so he could explain the serious financial ramifications of the thousands and thousands of dollars I'd potentially be throwing away if I quit football.

Well, my Mom and Dad were what I can kindly describe as '*country folks*' and not at all familiar with college football scholarships paying for everything a gifted high school football player would need to make it through college. *Because they knew nothing about scholarships, I knew nothing about scholarships*. Heck, *I didn't even know what a scholarship was!* So, this very good man, my 9th grade football coach at Jinks Junior High School, truly changed my life forever because being a football player, and the many disciplines (*determination, hard work, leadership and plain and simple sheer guts*) I gained from that experience, truly changed me as a person more than anything else I've ever done.

Without a single doubt in my mind, this was the #1 LIFE CHANGING EXPERIENCE IN MY LIFE! I truly believe what I've achieved in my life so far is because of this great 9th grade football coach. I want to tip my black hat to that fine human being and coach. So, this Panama City, Florida football experience has meant a lot to my life, and even though we only lived there for one year, it was a very important year for me personally. That year set me on a course of multiple other life achievements that I would proudly stack up with many other high achievers I've met in my nearly 75 years at this thing called *life*.

City #9 - Once again, we had to move... Our new home in *Rome, New York* was a four-block walk to *Rome Free Academy High School (RFA)*. RFA was a big high school with 3,200 students and a very nice football stadium that could hold over 7,000 people, and in those days, we'd fill it! Plus, the RFA gym had a fantastic weightlifting facility, something I'd never seen before. That, too, changed my life! My family lived in Rome for three years until the end of my junior year, when again, in the Summer before my senior year of high school, my beloved Dad was transferred to the *Cherry Point Marine Corps Air Station* on the coast of North Carolina. (more on that later)

When I arrived in Rome, New York in the Winter of 1961, I was in the 9th grade, and I immediately went to RFA and introduced myself to the Head Football Coach, the now late, forever-loved and one-and-only **George Flood** (See Photo on This Page). Ironically, Coach Flood was a former *United States Marine Drill Sergeant!* This great man believed in hard work and what he did as our high school coach clearly increased my pain tolerance level a great deal! That's because, when practice started in mid-August, the football team would practice three times a day for two weeks with one day off each week! Yes, that's correct... we had *morning... afternoon... and early evening* practices. They were called, '*three-a-days*,' and they were brutal!

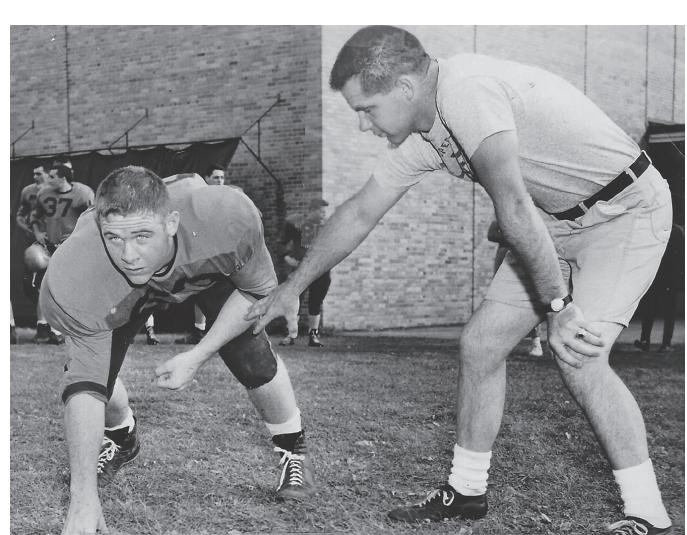
When I went to the first day of practice as a sophomore, like all other sophomores, I was assigned to the *Junior Varsity (JV Team)*. The JV Team I was assigned to started its practices separate from the *Varsity* but at the same time and in another area of the vast RFA Football Complex. With only two games left in the short eight-game football season mandated in Upstate Rome, New York because the snows near Canada would hit so early, Coach Flood set up a scrimmage game for the *Varsity* against the *JV Team*.

Because of my performance in that scrimmage with the *Varsity*, the stage was set for me to be a starter as a rising junior. During the next season, though I was only 5'11" and weighed 175 pounds, Coach Flood and the late Line Coach, **Ed Weed**, made me a starting offensive and defensive tackle! They told me they did that because they felt I had the ability to do both jobs, even though I weighed 55 pounds less than **Tom Myslinski**, who was a senior and the starting tackle on the other side of the line. He was 6'2" and weighed 230, and he went to Maryland on a full scholarship. Tom is still a friend of mine to this day. So, my junior year was a really good year because it set me up to be a second-year starter in my senior year.

Home At Last

Aside from continuing my football career, the most important thing that happened to me in Rome, New York occurred the Summer before my sophomore year, not long after my Dad had moved us there. I was at a place called *Franklin Field* playing baseball when I noticed that a fist fight had broken out. So, I left the game because I was interested in watching these guys fight. One of the two guys was doing a real number on the other guy. Immediately after the fight ended, because I was a new guy in town, I walked up to the guy who had clearly won and introduced myself to him. His name was **Russ Marchione**, and I said, 'Russ, I just saw how well you handled yourself in that fight, and I want to congratulate you! I also want to introduce myself to you and let you know that I'm a new guy in town, and I NEVER want to get into a fight with you! Okay?' He laughed and said, 'Sure. That's fine with me.' And, at that precise moment in the Summer of 1961, **Russell Joseph Marchione**, a truly great *Italian Kid*, became the *BEST FRIEND OF MY ENTIRE LIFE*.

Russ and I hung out together a lot for two years. We liked the same things, such as drinking beer and chasing girls. Then, (See Norm Cates, Jr. Page 10)



Norm Cates, Jr. and the Late Coach George Flood

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...Norm Cates, Jr.

continued from page 8

something happened that changed my life for sure... I was rolling along in Rome, New York, enjoying life just fine until, one day, my Dad came home, and he had *another sad look* on his face. I recognized that look because I had seen it in Tampa when he/we got transferred again after just two weeks. But, because of my friendships in Rome, and my role on the RFA Football Team, this news from my Dad was much worse! That was because I was about to start my senior year of football at RFA, and I was going to be a second-year starter both ways, as a linebacker and an offensive guard. And, while I didn't know it at the time, I was destined to be elected one of two RFA Co-Captains, along with my friend, **Rick Harris**, our senior year. So, I really wanted to continue playing football in Rome!

Very sadly, I told my best friend, Russ, the awful news that I was having to move to a place where there were only 800 students in the entire high school. I told him how badly I wanted to play in Rome where I'd made friends with many teammates and others in the Rome community. Russ said he was very sorry to hear this bad news.

The next day, Russ and I talked again, and he said to me, 'Norm, my sister, **Loretta**, is going away for Nursing School, and that means we're going to have a spare bedroom available.' Russ' parents, the late **Dominick and Loretta Marchione**, were two of the greatest human beings who ever lived! May they both Rest In Peace. Russ continued, 'So, I talked to my Mom and Dad, and we agreed that we want to invite you to live with us your senior year at RFA so you can play with the RFA football team you've worked so very hard to be a part of.'

WOW, I was stunned! Talk about being **EXCITED!** I had **NOT** thought of this idea at all! It was all Russ' idea, and I have been eternally and forever grateful to him and his Mom and Dad for what they did for me.

When Russ made the invitation to me to live with them, I couldn't believe my ears! I said, 'Russ, let me go home and discuss this with my Mom and Dad.' I immediately did that, and while they were not thrilled about the

idea, they certainly realized that saying **YES** was the *only decent thing to do because it would be fair to me*. After all, they realized I had been forced to spend my lifetime so far moving every few years (or in one case, two weeks). So, my loving Mom and Dad both felt I'd earned this opportunity the very hard way... *One move at a time!*

I lived in Dominick and Loretta Marchione's home for ten months until I graduated from RFA on June 27th of 1964. At the end of the football season, I was named to the *Upstate New York All Star Football Team*, so with the game films supplied by Coach Flood, and the All Star Honor, the now late **Coach Earl Edwards**, Head Coach at N.C. State, gave me a full, all expenses paid football scholarship.

Early Lessons Learned

C.I. - Wow, that is truly an incredible journey, and you were not even 20 yet! Moving around so much, what lessons did you learn?

NC - Having lived through our home being moved nine different times, I believe two lessons I've learned that have helped me a lot over the years are:

1. Develop a lifetime habit of NEVER MEETING A STRANGER. By that, I mean never let a stranger continue to be a stranger once you've both met. *Always be genuinely interested* in what the new people you meet are doing in and with their lives.

2. You rarely get something in this world IF you don't ask for it.

N.C. State University

C.I. - As you mentioned, your time playing football didn't end at Rome Free Academy. Instead, you continued on at N.C. State University on a scholarship. Please take us through that experience.

NC - Here I was, an extremely determined young guy who earned a one-year full football Scholarship to N.C. State. But, I had to show up in Raleigh and prove myself before I would be granted and awarded the remaining three years of the scholarship. Did I prove myself? Long story short, I sure did! But, here's

what happened.

Reporting to N.C. State for the freshman football team in September of 1964, I was assigned to a tiny room in *Tucker Dorm*, of all things, *Cates Avenue* (By the way, they didn't name Cates Avenue after me! They named it in honor of the *Charles F. Cates and Sons Company* of Cates Pickle Company fame!). There were three of us crammed into that tiny dorm room, and the bathrooms were down the hall.

The two guys I roomed with were great fellows. There was **Chuck Amato**, a truly amazing dude who, in addition to being an All State Linebacker out of *Easton, Pennsylvania*, had also won the *Pennsylvania State Wrestling Championship* at 167 pounds *three years in a row!* Later in life, Chuck went on to be the N.C. State Head Coach for six years, and he did a fine job during that era. Chuck recently retired after 45 amazing years of coaching football at all levels but the pros. There was also **Art McMahon**, who was from *New Jersey*. He became an early starter and was also elected to be one of the Co-Captains of our 1967 Team, along with **Steve 'Pigpen' Warren**. I nicknamed Steve 'Pigpen' because, during rainy day practices, Steve would often end up totally covered with mud! I know he hated that nickname, but that didn't stop us from electing him Co-Captain. And, he turned out to be a great player and team leader.

Coach Earl Edwards was N.C. State's Head Football Coach for many years, and in our Class of 1964, he had recruited some truly great high school football players from *all over the country*. So, to say the least, I

was very honored to be given a full scholarship in this class, and then, shortly after arriving at N.C. State, to have been voted by that special 1964 Freshman Team to be one of their Co-Captains along with **Jay 'Momma' McDuffie**. We nicknamed Jay 'Momma' because he was always looking out for any of our teammates who were home sick or not feeling well.

Let me also mention that our special freshman class included a defensive tackle named **Dennis Byrd** (the late), who went on to be named *1st Team All American three years in a row* and a *1st Round NFL Pick by the New York Jets!* And, we had **Freddie Combs**, another super star, who would also make *1st Team All American Team* our senior year in 1967. Plus, we had a great kicker our senior year named **Gerald Warren**, and he also made *1st Team All American!* So, as freshmen, when Jay and I were elected to be Co-Captains of this amazing freshman team, we both felt very highly honored to be Co-Captains among such talented company! Finally, but certainly not least, there was **Pete 'Mad Dog' Bailey**, my teammate, roommate and best friend at N.C. State.

Following my freshman year, and after playing second-string defensive end my sophomore year and then as a second-string offensive guard my junior year, I went on a massive weight training program. Here is what happened... Immediately after the last game of our 1966 season, I had five days to lose 17 pounds, from 200 down to 183, so I could pass the required *U.S. Air Force R.O.T.C. (Reserve Officer Training Corp.)* pilot

(See **Norm Cates, Jr.** Page 12)

Comments From Robert "Quail" White**Comments From Robert "Quail" White,
N.C. State Classmate and Friend for Life**

In the halcyon years of the mid-1960s, in the shadow of *Riddick Stadium*, the 'Midget from Troy' somehow found a role of distinction as a player who was initially awarded a one-year full scholarship to play on the *N.C. State University Wolfpack Football Team*. He played his way into a four-year full ride.

Another reason to celebrate the 75-year-old energy Norm brings is his devotion to a superlative element of our too short days as sentient beings: *Sustained Friendship!* It is an old saw that life pals are the best. With this guy, that is true in aces! No matter the amount of time between conversations, Norm's joy drips from the connection over the decades and is something to behold and celebrate. I love you fellow... for that alone. But, there is more.

Revisiting events and foibles of youthful association 30, 40 and 50 years later, is the cement that makes the aforementioned friendship so durable over time. How could anyone forget *'Fort Lauderdale at Spring Break'* in Cates company. Being rescued from the 'pokey' (jail) to several indelicate days on a yacht as a result of Cates' close attention to detail is subject for speculation and endless stories over the years. Let your imagination run to the outrageous, and you have the idea.

Conversations on long-shared drives to the coast of North Carolina to Norm's home or to my own home in the Virginia mountains were early efforts to find our life path and cemented shared aspirations. Imagine the pleasure of watching Norm's leadership connect the broad and vital health club industry with *Club Insider*, now with a run of decades. This from a guy, who like me, had *'serious difficulty'* with *Freshman English*. So, he founds a newspaper, and I spend decades grading history essays. Go *Figure!*

It is an honor to be asked to raise a toast to a pal, a lifelong friend, a soul mate on this crazy sail on the wonderful ocean of opportunity that is life in the U.S.A. Norm's journey of 75 years defines success built on energy, devoted focus, most importantly, 'paying ahead' with good will and never-failing friendship. Go cat go. You are one hip Daddy-O!

With Love, Your Pal Quail (aka Bob White)

Comments From Russell Marchione**Comments From Russell Marchione,
Rome Free Academy Classmate and Best Friend Ever**

Club Insider (C.I.) - When, where and how did you meet Norm?

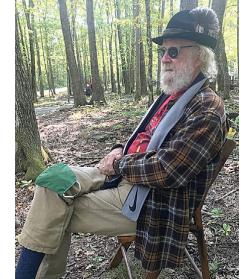
Russell Marchione (RM) - I met your Dad the Summer before our sophomore year in high school and became very good friends through high school. He lived with us during our senior year of high school, and we became like brothers. We met at a local ball field where all the kids hung out. I was in a fist fight with another kid and was cleaning this kid's clock, and your father said to himself, 'I better get to know him.' The rest is history.

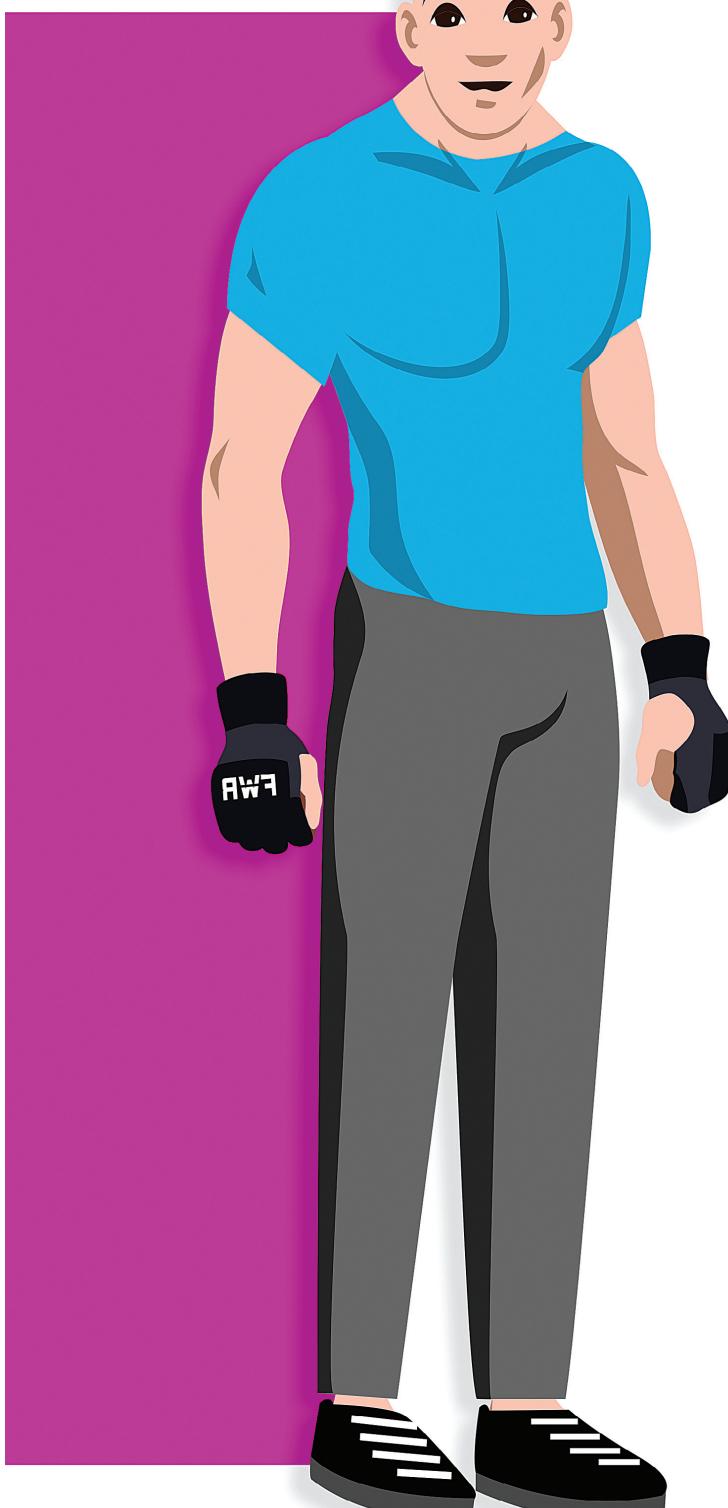
C.I. - Please share a fond memory you have of or with Norm.

RM - We had many, many fond memories, but one that stands out in my mind was when we graduated from high school in 1964. We partied for a few days, and then, he and I went to *Reading, Pennsylvania* with your grandparents where they bought Norm a car. It was a *Chevrolet Corvair*. The memory was driving from Reading, PA to *Morehead City, North Carolina* with the top down the whole way. The sun burn was worth it!!! It was such a liberating time: the sixties, the music and looking forward to the adventures ahead.

C.I. - Please express a birthday wish to Norm.

RM - Norm, where have all the years gone! Have a safe, healthy and the happiest birthday you can possibly have!!!





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...Norm Cates, Jr.

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training physical. Somehow, I did it! I bought a rubber suit and went on a starvation diet, and in just five days, I lost those 17 pounds and weighed in at 183. After that weigh-in, starting Thanksgiving weekend of 1966, I went on a three-day-per-week, two-and-a-half-hours-per-workout upper body weightlifting program in which I would do ten sets each of six different lifts: *Standing Clean and Press, Bench Press, Standing Strict Bicep Curls, Standing Rows, Dead Lifts and Bridge Bench Presses.*

Simultaneously, I went onto a *Hoffman High Protein Milk Shake* augmented diet. My program was successful, because from December 1, 1966 to August 1, 1967, a total of eight full months, I went from **183 pounds to 237 pounds** with a high percentage of my weight gain being muscle. Then, on August 1, 1967, I reported to *Myrtle Beach Air Force Base* in *South Carolina* for a mandatory one-month-long R.O.T.C. Program, in which six days a week we would rise at 5AM for two hours of exercises such as pushups, pullups, sit-ups, running, etc. During that month, my body weight went from 237 to 220.

So, 220 was my football playing weight at guard when I reported to N.C. State for my senior year of football. Here I was, a dude who had played 2nd string guard my junior year behind a guy named **John Stec**, who made *1st Team All ACC* at guard, to then become starting guard on our 1967 Team. At one point, our team was 8 and 0 and ranked #3 in the country. And, as a starter on this special team, I was honored to be named as a member of the *Associated Press' 1st Team All Atlantic Coast Conference Football Team for 1967*, and I also received an *Honorable Mention on the 1967 All American Team*, both achievements I'm very proud of. Let me add that one month of R.O.T.C. Summer Camp training helped me achieve all of this.

Looking back on it all, ironically, the decision my 9th Grade High School Football Coach convinced my Mom, Dad and me to make, which was to drop my newspaper routes and play 9th grade football, had *finally paid off 8 years later!*



Norm Cates, Jr. at Moody Air Force Base in 1968



The 50th Reunion of the 1967 N.C. State Wolfpack Football Team that Beat the University of Georgia Bulldogs in the 1967 Liberty Bowl

C.I. - I know what football has meant in my life and the lessons I've learned from the sport. What lessons did you learn from this experience?

NC - There's a few:

■ In football, remember and never forget that *it isn't for the weak*. If you can't tolerate pain, forget about it, because football is NOT for you. But, trust me when I say that *life is often very painful*, too, no matter what you do. So, *having a powerful, disciplined mind* when you're dealing with *physical or emotional/mental pain, or both*, you will do better in life. And, **YOU WILL SURVIVE.**

■ In football, always keep your head up whenever you're blocking a defenseman or if you are defenseman, always apply the same rule... *always keep your head up, not down*. And, when attacking challenges in life, *keeping your head up and going into challenges with intensity will give you a better result than if you do not attack!*

A Flying Man

C.I. - Following college, like your father, your early career was in the Air Force. Please tell us about that experience.

NC - Being a pilot became a goal in my life when I was just a kid. Having grown up with my Dad in the aviation world and being at Air Force bases all around the world all of my

early life certainly fueled that goal. I never, ever forgot my goal, so when I got a full football scholarship to N.C. State, I immediately found out about and signed up for the *U.S. Air Force R.O.T.C.* Four years later, in October of 1972, upon graduating from N.C. State, I was immediately commissioned as a *2nd Lieutenant* in the *U.S. Air Force* and stationed at *Moody Air Force Base* in *Valdosta, Georgia*. There, I attended the *U.S. Air Force's 53-week Undergraduate Pilot Training Program*. If I recall correctly, I finished **#7 out of a Class of 72 student pilots**.

Upon graduation from pilot training, I was a qualified enough pilot that they made me an *Instructor Pilot* in the same 53-week program I had just graduated from. This was during the *Vietnam War*, and during that time, I taught about 60 student pilots,

guys who had zero jet flying time, how to fly jets. Then, I was honored to be selected by the *Base Commander* to become what they called a *'Check Airman'* in what they called the *'Stan Board.'* My job in that role was to give proficiency check rides to the other instructor pilots, including the *Base Commander!* This was an amazingly interesting job. Moreover, the same *Base Commander* that recommended me for the *Stan Board* also recommended me for a job at the *U.S. Air Force Academy* in *Colorado Springs, Colorado*.

I was hired at the *Air Force Academy* to become an *Athletic Instructor*. My *Base Commander* told me he had personally recommended me because *he thought I had the talent, mindset and potential to be* (See **Norm Cates, Jr. Page 13**)

Comments From Pat "Red Baron" Nolte**Comments From Pat "Red Baron" Nolte,
Fellow USAF Pilot and Friend for Life**

Club Insider (C.I.) - When, where and how did you meet Norm?

Pat Nolte (PN) - Norm and I first met and became friends in the fall of 1968 at *Moody Air Force Base* in *Valdosta Georgia*. We were students in the same Air Force Pilot Training class. After graduation from pilot training, we attended T-37 instructor training at *Perrin Air Force Base* in *Texas*, and we served together as instructor pilots, first at *Randolph Air Force Base* in *Texas* then back at *Moody Air Force Base* until Norm left the Air Force.



Norm Cates and Pat Nolte in a USAF T-38

C.I. - Please share a fond memory you have of or with Norm.

PN - Norm and I did not fly together during pilot training; two student pilots operating the same aerospace vehicle just didn't happen (probably for good reason!). Once we had checked out as instructors, however, we did have the occasional opportunity to 'slip the surly bonds' in the same aircraft. I've spent a good bit of time 'up close and personal' with Air Force aviators, and I can say without hesitation that Norm was a superb natural pilot. He just had a magnificent set of hands. Along the same lines, he was also the consummate professional when operating an aircraft. It's no secret that Norm liked a good party; he was the sort of guy who definitely enjoyed having a good time. However, once it was time to put on a flight suit, all that 'party stuff' went out the window, replaced by talent, and more importantly, a total professional attitude and approach.

C.I. - Please express a birthday wish to Norm.

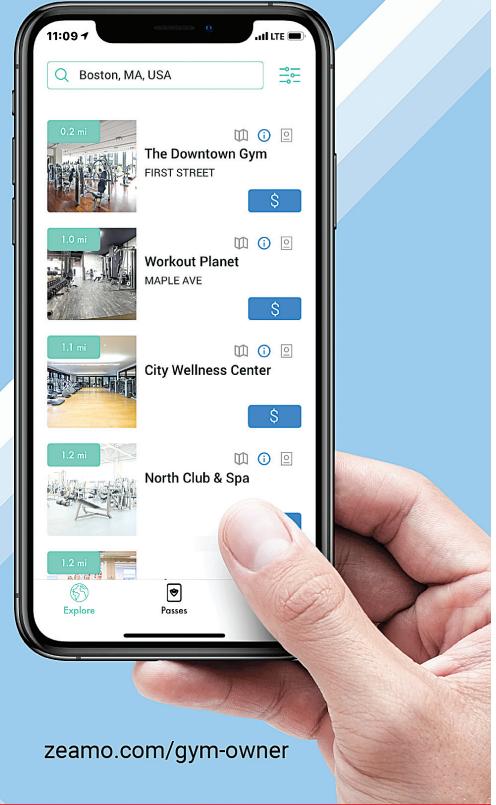
PN - Though we can't be there to help you celebrate, be assured Linda and I will raise a glass of adult beverage (wine for her, scotch for me) and toast your *Three Quarters of a Century* milestone. As you celebrate, you might remember that, while it's true that old age ain't for sissies, it's also true that the alternative isn't very good, either. Have a super day and many more. Take care and stay safe.



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...Norm Cates, Jr.

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a General in the U.S. Air Force. Just a few months later, the airlines restarted hiring, and I had to tell my Base Commander, my Squadron Commander and my friends, 'Sorry, but I've got to go be an Airline Pilot.'

C.I. - What lessons did you learn from that experience?

NC - What I learned is that, in life, you never know what's going to happen, and just when you think you've got things figured out... boom... things can change really fast!

C.I. - As you mentioned, following your time in the Air Force, you became a commercial airline pilot. Please tell us about that experience and how it actually led to your entrance into the health and fitness club industry.

NC - On January 6, 1973, I got out of the Air Force and immediately moved into the spare bedroom of my old friend and teammate, Pete Bailey's Riverbend Condo in Atlanta, Georgia. For any of you who have seen the amazing Academy Award nominated movie, *Catch Me If You Can*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Tom Hanks, you have seen exactly where I lived for four years, two years in Pete's condo and two years in my own apartment overlooking the entire scene. To say this was probably the *LUCKIEST* happening in my life would be an understatement. And, it was during this time that I got hired for two different jobs as a commercial pilot.

The first was as a Co-pilot on the Holder Construction Company's eight

passenger Sabreliner Corporate Jet. Then, after flying the Sabreliner, I was extremely lucky again to be hired by what has, through multiple airline mergers, become Delta Airlines. The odds of getting that airline job were very low, so the story of how it happened is one of sheer fortune.

One night, I was at the *Riverbend Clubhouse* waiting my turn to play on one of the two racquetball courts they had there when I met a guy named **Gerald Cox**. While we waited and chatted, he told me he was the *General Manager of the Southern Airways Airlines Employment Office* (This is TRUE, folks, I'm not lying!).

I said to him, 'WOW! That's great, Gerald! I've got to tell you that I've had an employment application turned in and on file in your Employment Offices for over two months now, and I've been hoping and praying for an interview. I've got close to 2,000 hours of jet time as a jet instructor pilot and as a Sabreliner pilot, and I would greatly appreciate an interview.'

He laughed and said, 'Well, you happen to be in the right place at the right time. Norm, right now, we have over 1,200 applications on file, and we are hiring pilots at the slow rate of 20 pilots per class per month. I'm about to finish a new class that will start next week, so why don't you call me at my office tomorrow and I will set up an interview for you with me and the *Chief Pilot, Bubba Shanahan*, who is also interviewing new hires.'

Wow! I said, 'You bet I will! Let me find a pen, and I'll write down your phone number.' So, I went into the weight room and

found a pen and an unused workout card. The next day, I called him and got an interview with *Southern Airways* that afternoon. I was hired the next day, and had my destiny been different, I would now be a *retired Delta Air Lines Captain*.

Again, this is a true story! I was hired the next day, I went to a 30-day orientation class, and I started flying. Ironically, after being hired in April of 1973, six months later, in October of 1973, 39 other pilots and me, all new hires, were furloughed for what turned out to be four years! We no longer received pay and most benefits, but we did have one nice benefit remain during that time, which was they allowed us to ride on DC9 jump seats for free!

The Health and Fitness Club Industry

C.I. - How did your furlough lead you into the health and fitness club industry?

NC - As you may know, there's an old saying, '*The Lord works in mysterious ways*,' and I can give testimony here to that being a fact and my belief that the Lord was working for me when he got me laid off by the airline for four years. I believe that to be a '*Divinely Guided*' event, because it led me to meet in this order: **Ray Irwin, Rich Boggs and Fred Streck**. The four of us created a chain of nine racquetball clubs called *Courtsouth* that eventually had 58 courts in Atlanta and 50 courts in out-of-town franchises. These nine clubs also offered things such as *Nautilus* rooms; free weight rooms; indoor tracks; swimming pools; bar/lounges; locker rooms with full amenity packages including steam,

sauna and whirlpools; and typically, LOTS and LOTS of parking! Here's how it happened.

Once again, while living at *Riverbend* and waiting for a racquetball court (*laughing...* that seemed to become a theme in my life), I met another person who changed my life forever, and that was the late **Lyle Ray Irwin**! From that meeting in 1974, I became deeply involved in the health, racquet and sportsclub industry, and since 1974, I've spent 47 years of my life involved in this great industry. Meeting Ray Irwin that night, while he and I waited for a racquetball court, truly changed my life forever.

Not very long after I met Ray, we were again by the courts one evening when I asked Ray to consider investing in the *Southeast Land Syndications* I was selling with my college football teammate and friend, Pete Bailey. Ray told me that he couldn't invest because he was saving his money to start a new business. I asked what kind of business it was, and he told me it was a '*Racquetball Club*.' Needless to say, I became very interested in Ray's project, and we became involved with a local guy named **Bobby Siegal**, whose father was rich. So, we sold Mr. Siegal on the racquetball club idea, and he decided to do it... with his son, **Bobby, NOT WITH US!** We only found out about it when a big billboard sign was erected on the land next to I-285 in Atlanta. To say that we were pissed would be an understatement!

Fast forward a few months, and Ray and I met the one and only **Rich 'Romeo Papa' Boggs**. An old Air Force Instructor Pilot of mine, **Ed Jelk**, introduced us to Rich. They (*See Norm Cates, Jr. Page 14*)

...Norm Cates, Jr.

continued from page 13

were both Georgia Tech graduates, and Rich had just moved back to Atlanta from California. He had come back to Atlanta because there were ZERO racquetball clubs here at the time, and he intended to build the first one. So, there we were, the three musketeers of the racquetball world: *Ray Irwin, Rich Boggs and Norm Cates.*

We then had a meeting at Rich's house where we met the late **Fred 'Fast Freddie' Streck**. The bank we had been talking to for a loan to start the business had recommended him to Rich because he was a very successful customer of theirs. Fred was a very wealthy night club owner who dabbled in the world of construction. His two famous Atlanta night clubs, one named *Xanadu* and the other named *The Stone Pony*, provided Fred (and us) with the \$300,000+ in cash we needed to build our first club. Good thing, too, because combined, Rich, Ray and I didn't have a pot to piss in! Also attending was a friend of Rich's, an architect named **Peter Hand**, whom we had already been working with.

Truly amazingly, in just an hour and a half, we formed a partnership among us four guys. And, even more amazingly, these words came from Fred's mouth to wrap up the meeting. *'We will be under construction on Friday morning!'* That pledge was made by Fred on a Wednesday night.

At 10AM the Friday morning following that Wednesday night meeting, I went to the building, and when I walked in, I spotted *Court #1* with brand-new cinder block walls already over 10 feet high! Clearly, as he promised, Fred was wasting no time getting this baby done. That afternoon, we had our *Membership Presales Office* open, and Rich, our marketing guru, was preparing brochures for membership sales. By the time we opened what we originally called *Courthouse 1*, we had presold **1,200** annual memberships. Then, in just three months, we had **5,000** memberships.

Our model was to sell very low-priced annual memberships for **\$15** a year for a single, **\$25** for a couple and **\$30** for a family. People would then book one of our ten courts and pay by the hour for court time. The hourly rate in non-prime time was **\$2.50 per person**, and starting at 4PM, prime time was **\$4 per person**. For months, we were **100% booked from 6:30AM to 11PM at night!**



The Courtsouth Boys!

In two years, we had nine clubs either open or under construction. We had four in Atlanta; one in Columbus, Georgia; two in Knoxville, Tennessee; one in Murfreesboro, Tennessee (outside of Nashville); and one in Birmingham, Alabama. Following the success of *Courthouse 1* and additional locations, we changed the name to *Courtsouth*, and we grew to have **60,000** memberships!

An Infant Industry

C.I. - In 1974, when you entered the health and fitness club industry, it was truly in an infant state. Please describe the clubs of old compared to what has become the norm of today.

NC - They are two different worlds, really. In the early days, we got by without *Lifecycles* because they weren't yet invented and brought to market by **Ray Wilson and Augie Nieto**. When they arrived, we immediately acquired dozens of them. Of course, so did our competitors. And, at the time, all we had for strength training were five *Nautilus* machines, dedicated primarily to lower body work and a small free weight room. We added more *Nautilus* upper body machines, and we installed **Bill Hubner's Paramount Sports Trainer Multi-Station Weight Machines**. So, needless to say, the health and fitness club world is far, far more advanced today than it was 47 years ago when I started. Later, as we went our own ways outside of the original Courtsouth partnership, my future clubs were multipurpose format. We had a lot of what you would expect today, but of course, they were earlier versions of everything (laughing).

C.I. - During those early days in the industry, you became a Co-Founder and the First President of IHRSA (then IRSa). Please take us through this founding experience and the early days of the Association.

NC - I was nominated by my Courtsouth partners to become a *Board Member* at the 1978 *National Court Club Association (NCCA)* Convention in Sarasota, Florida. I was elected to that Board, and that's how I met and became a lifelong friend of the **amazing Rick Caro**. To say that *'Uncle Rick' Caro* (as I have referred to him for years) had an enormously positive impact on my life would be yet another understatement.

At the time we met in Sarasota, Rick was also serving on the *Board of Directors* of the *National Tennis Association (NTA)*. So, here we had this brilliant New Yorker named Rick Caro partnering up with another fellow New Yorker (laughing... I say that because I went to high school in Upstate New York) to pursue an idea that Rick had. I was very excited about the idea, which was to merge the NCCA and NTA to create a new organization called the **International Racquet and Sportsclub Association (IRSA)**, what we now call IHRSA. It was Rick's idea, pure and simple. And, today, **Uncle Rick deserves all the credit for IHRSA's existence. Period.**

We kept the IRSa name for 12 years, at which time, under the leadership of the Association's President at the time, **Cecil Spearman**, a great man and good friend I call 'Daddy Rabbit,' and *Founder and Owner of the Laguna Niguel Racquet Clubs in California*, we added the 'H' for **Health** into the IRSa name and acronym to make it **IHRSA**. Hopefully, this September in Los Angeles, we're going to have our 40th **IHRSA**

Anniversary Convention and Trade Show! Of course, all of those plans are subject to developments with the **COVID-19 Disaster!**

C.I. - Please describe the importance of IHRSA and the effect you feel it has had on the industry over the past 40 years.

NC - Without a doubt in my mind, IHRSA has done more to positively influence and improve the health, racquet and sportsclub industry than any other single organization in the world. Just like the U.S. industry and in countries worldwide, IHRSA is suffering significantly right now. But, **Brent Darden, IHRSA's Interim President and CEO**, is doing his best to lead the Association through this

disaster that is affecting the entire world and every industry within it. Sadly, Brent has had to make massive staff layoffs. But, with vaccinations just now rolling out, there is light at the end of the tunnel even if it is still a very small one.

Club Insider is Born

C.I. - In 1993, you made the difficult decision to leave the day-to-day operations of the health and fitness club business. This led to the creation of *Club Insider*. How did this decision come about, why did you make it, and how did *Club Insider* come into existence?

(See **Norm Cates, Jr.** Page 15)

Comments From Rick Caro

Comments From Rick Caro, Co-Founder of IHRSA, President of Management Vision, Inc., Health and Fitness Club Industry Colleague and Friend

Club Insider (C.I.) - When, where and how did you meet Norm?

Rick Caro (RC) - I met Norm for the first time when he and I were elected to the *National Court Club Association (NCCA)* Board for the first time. We were elected at a national meeting in Sarasota, which coincidentally, where I have a second home now.

Norm was partnering with three other individuals with a series of racquetball-oriented clubs in Atlanta and licensed clubs in nearby states. He loved people, so he focused on customer service. He focused on front desk staff interaction with members. Because he was so adept, he was teaching others in the industry the training of how that function should work.

This was the time when pure racquetball-only clubs were adjusting to becoming multi-sport clubs. Adding fitness was a real transition. He was so early that I think he was the first in his market to buy *Lifecycle* bikes (the red, blue, yellow, etc. colored ones).

His strength was people. He loved the members and the staff. He handed off the back office to others. And, he had good partners.



C.I. - Please share a fond memory you have of or with Norm.

RC - He could be impulsive. He married **Ilena** at the second IHRSA Convention in Las Vegas without any real preparation or planning. A crazy story too long to tell, but it was one time where 'What happens in Las Vegas did NOT stay in Las Vegas.' He loved women and was a charmer. He specialized in partying. He even handed out Coonskin Davy Crockett Hats to his fellow pioneers at the 1st IHRSA Convention.

After we formed IRSa (which became IHRSA years later), we went for a celebratory drink at the top of the now defunct *World Trade Center Towers*. It was a great view. On the way down, he hit the Emergency Stop button. The sirens triggered a system where eight of us had to be brought down manually in the elevator system. Not all loved that experience.

Norm and I spent the first year of IRSa on the phone many times per week at 11PM at night dealing with crises and challenges. The saving grace was the hiring of **John McCarthy** as our first *Executive Director*. What a blessing for all.

C.I. - In your opinion, what has Norm meant to the health and fitness club industry?

RC - Norm is beyond loyal to the industry. It is truly in his blood. He loved owning and operating clubs. Then, he joined a Roundtable group. They helped him brainstorm the concept of an industry pro to the formation of *Club Insider*. It was the ideal fit for him at that time. And, it has been a fixture for the club industry ever since. He was not a gifted writer, yet he successfully navigated a startup newspaper to be that fixture for all these years.

He takes positions, has no filter, is fervent in his interest in investigating wrongs, loves to defend the industry, is inspired by the industry's small businesspeople and entrepreneurs, doesn't know what he doesn't know and is truly a business survivor. He loves to highlight the 'little guy,' cares deeply about people, has so many loyal friends in the industry and loves IHRSA to the core.

C.I. - Please express a birthday wish to Norm.

RC - Given health issues and so many challenges all have been facing, we need to honor Norm on such a 75th milestone event. Hopefully, he will continue to retain his fervor and loyalty (two of his admirable qualities). In addition, we all hope he can maintain good health and help Justin to continue to have *Club Insider* telling special stories, provide an avenue for a variety of writers and allow businesses to have an opportunity to share their message. I wish health, happiness and success for Norm, as he hits this momentous year.



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...Norm Cates, Jr.

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NC - Well, Justin, you were just eight years old at the time, and we had built your Mom a nice antique store called *The Shops of Distinction* in Roswell, Georgia. That store kept her away from our home a lot. I still had four clubs, which also kept me away from home a lot, so I determined that my goal in life at that time would be to leave the day-to-day club business to create and enter into a home-based business where I could earn a living but still help our industry improve its operations. And, this would allow me to be an at-home Dad to you.

At the time, the late, great **Dr. Gerry Faust** had the terrific and now legendary *Faust Roundtable #1*. Rick Caro had introduced me to this great group of industry professionals and future long-time friends. We would all meet every three or four months, discussing our challenges and ideas, and seeing examples in the field with facility tours in each host city.

In Chicago, during our January 1993 meeting, I brought my request for help deciding on a new home-based business to our Roundtable, and we all brainstormed it together. The late **Jane Beusman**, beloved wife of our also beloved and late 'Brother' **Curt Beusman**, came up with the idea of a new industry publication when she said, 'Norm, we need to have a new, irreverent, outspoken industry publication that *Tells-It-Like-It-Is* to our industry, and I think that

would be a perfect new business that you could create and operate at home!' I was standing there with a flip chart and a magic marker in my hand, writing down the group's ideas, and I yelled, 'That's it!'

Four months later, at another Roundtable in California, we were brainstorming name ideas for my new publication when the late 'Brother' Curt Beusman said, 'We could call it *the Insider*. NO! Better yet, *The Club Insider*! Even better, *The Club Insider News*!' I smiled and once again exclaimed, 'That's it!' And, that WAS it. (We have since dropped the words *The* and *News* from our title to become *Club Insider*.)

Now, we are in our 28th year of publication, and I could not be prouder and happier with the fantastic job you, **JUSTIN CATES**, my Partner and Son, have done as our new Publisher since taking over when I was blind during those tough months in 2020! Thank you!

C.I. - Wow, Dad, thank you. As you always say, 'That's clear proof there is a God.' Please tell us why you feel that way.

NC - Dude... there is no way you and I would have survived what we've survived publishing *Club Insider* for what's now 325 monthly editions without 'Divine Guidance' from a higher power! *Period!* And, I will go to Heaven with that belief.

C.I. - It goes without saying that 2020 has been a horrible year for just about everyone. Though you have been fortunate to avoid

contracting the virus, you did experience a tough battle with blindness. Please take us through that experience.

NC - First, let me say this... without you achieving what you achieved with *Club Insider* when I went blind in March of the '2020 Year From Hell,' this conversation would be very different, and certainly not be presented in a new edition of *Club Insider*. So, **THANK YOU JUSTIN CATES!** You have made your Dad **VERY THANKFUL** and **VERY PROUD!**

As I hope everyone knows by now, I am **NO LONGER BLIND IN BOTH EYES!** In fact, I am able to see well with my left eye that now has a 20/25 rating. I can once again drive my car, read and write on my computer... you name it; I can do it. My right eye is a different story, though. It's about 90% blind except for a tiny segment of vision that is worthless. It goes without saying that having this happen in the middle of a pandemic certainly didn't present an easy experience, and no matter what, I **wouldn't wish blindness on anyone!**

C.I. - It is never easy to turn the reins of something you created over to someone else. But, in 2020, you needed to do so with *Club Insider*. Please take us through that experience.

NC - **TRUST.** That's the key and operative word I have for you here. I **TRUST** you 100% with both my/our newspaper and with my life, and that's all I have to say about that.

Oh yes... one other thing... **GOD HAS TRULY BLESSED ME WITH SUCH A TALENTED PARTNER WHO JUST ALSO HAPPENS TO BE A GREAT AND LOVING**

SON! I HONESTLY COULD NOT BE MORE BLESSED! GOOD ON YOU AND THANK YOU, JUSTIN CATES!

A Family Affair

C.I. - Dad, what strikes me about your entire story is how one thing led to another. You were in the right place at the right time multiple times and at least two of those times being waiting on a racquetball court at Riverbend! (laughing). And, it is not lost on me that all of that literally led to my existence, let alone what I get to do as a career. Please share your thoughts about this.

NC - Absolutely. This amazing and fun collection of fond memories and experiences would definitely not be complete without comments about **one of the greatest things to ever happen to me in my life**, and that was when I met **ILENA**, my Wife of almost 39 years now, and of course, your Mom!

One night back in my single days in Atlanta, I was introduced on a blind date to the **beautiful Ilena Marks**. After having been called by her friend, **Betsy Kappen**, to be a last-minute blind date for me, Ilena arrived at the *South of France Restaurant* around 10PM. We had a lovely dinner. Then, we went to a night club for dancing. Throughout the entire evening, we got along famously, and as we were dancing cheek-to-cheek at 2AM while night club staff were starting to place the chairs upside down on the tables, I looked down at her, and asked, 'Ilena, can you see (See Norm Cates, Jr. Page 16)

...Norm Cates, Jr.

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yourself married to me?' She smiled, looked up at me, and said, 'Yes.'

A few months later, in *Las Vegas, Nevada*, where Ilenna and I attended *IRSA's 2nd Annual Convention and Trade Show*. With prior conversation, but honestly, no advance planning at all, on **January 20, 1982**, Ilenna and I decided to get married at the *Chapel* adjacent to the *Riviera Hotel* in Vegas! **Doug Miller**, friend, an employee at the time, and later, a principal in *Sales Makers* with two other good friends of ours, **Ray Gordon** and **Eddie Tock**, was my **Best Man**.

Fast forward to **January 18, 1985**. This was clearly the **BEST DAY OF MY LIFE** because it was the day our wonderful son was born. As you know, you were born at the **Northside Hospital** here in Atlanta! And, I was so excited that I even hired an airplane to tow a banner around the hospital that read: **IT'S A BOY!!! JUSTIN CATES!!!** You have truly been a **BLESSING** to our family and a major **JOY** in our lives since your **Day One**.

All of the stops in my life led to you. Period. And, I may just be one of the luckiest guys in the world to have a son like you. *God blessed this family*.

Work Hard; Play Hard

C.I. - Your life has not been all work and no play. I think it's safe to say that anyone who knows us knows that you and I both work hard and play hard, so please take us through what has become a pretty fun hobby for you: *THE Great Characters and Legendary Ladies of Atlanta*.

NC - Over 30 years ago, a good friend of mine named **Ron Hudspeth** was working as a daily columnist for the *Atlanta Journal Constitution (AJC)*, and he had a great job there writing a daily commentary column about what he found out while on the scene in *Atlanta's fabulous night life*. Ron really had it rough



The Cates Family

(laughing). All he had to do was go out, drink and eat in Atlanta bars and restaurants, then write about the experience! So, this great dude had the entire *City of Atlanta, Georgia* in his back pocket. But, somehow, he just didn't like AJC Management. Another famous AJC Journalist, the late **Lewis Grizzard**, was buddies with Ron. And, Lewis had also grown to hate AJC Management... just like Ron did.

One day, Ron and Lewis were talking, and they both decided to walk out on AJC Management to protest what they felt was the bad way they were being treated. So, they made a pact to quit. The next day, though, Lewis talked to Ron and told him he wasn't going to quit the AJC because of a heart problem he had that required health insurance, and the company provided the needed insurance. Lewis had no idea if he could get insurance anywhere else, so he told

Ron he was *not* going to resign in protest.

Ron decided he was still going to quit the AJC. So, Ron and I were drinking one night and talking about all of this, and I told him: 'Dude... you have a market brand notoriety that you'd be a fool to just walk away from and get nothing for it! What we need to do is dream up some kind of business that you can start to take advantage and benefit from the *brand name* you now own in the marketplace. I want to think about this for you.'

The next day, I called him and said: 'I've got it! What you need to do is create a *nightlife newspaper*, where each month, in print, you get out there doing what you used to do at the AJC. Report on *WHAT's HAPPENING* and *WHERE!*' But,

this publication that has your writing in it *will have YOUR NAME ON IT, not their name!* And, you can throw parties, take trips and just have **FUN** with it.' Ron called me back and said, 'I'm going to use your idea and start a *nightlife newspaper*.'

Well, he did exactly that, and it was called *The Hudspeth Report*. He took on his beautiful girlfriend at the time, the lovely **Cathy Brown**, as a partner with him, and they published it for about 25 years. Ironically, a few years later, when I started *Club Insider*, Cathy did our layout work, and she continued in that role for eight years.

Each year, as I originally suggested to him, Hudspeth would also produce a big annual party called '*The Great CHARACTERS of Atlanta Party*', and that event was *always a hoot!* These parties were always well attended, drawing several hundred *FUN LOVERS* every year. People just loved to be with the celebrities that Ron would attract. At its peak, there were about 60 '*Great CHARACTERS*' honored every year, and this special group included such Atlanta-area luminaries as *Atlanta Mayor, Sam Massell*; *TV Sportscaster, Brad Nessler*; *NFL great, the late Alex Hawkins*; the late *Pete 'The Northside Barkeep'*, who was a celebrity himself because Ron wrote about him a lot; *bar owner/operator, Bill Houck*; *bar owner/operator, Bill Swearingen*; and *Doug McKendrick*, the highly successful owner of a very popular steakhouse called *McKendrick's*. There were many others, but you get the picture.

Over 20 years ago now, Ron moved to Costa Rica, and the annual event went dormant for three years. But, neither of us wanted it to die forever, so with Ron's agreement, I took over the party production duties and have been putting on the event every year ever since. Along the way, it became clear that, *for every Great Character, there was a Legendary Lady*. Several asked (See *Norm Cates, Jr.* Page 17)

Comments From Brent Darden**Comments From Brent Darden, Interim President & CEO of IHRSA, Health and Fitness Club Industry Colleague and Friend**

Club Insider (C.I.) - When, where and how did you meet Norm?

Brent Darden (BD) - Like so many, I first met Norm at the annual IHRSA Convention and Trade Show in the 1990s.

C.I. - Please share a fond memory you have of or with Norm.

BD - Two memories stand out very vividly to me. The first is seeing him each year at the IHRSA Convention wearing his trademark hat and engaging in whatever initiatives were priorities at the time. The second is my recent personal conversations with him shortly after I stepped into the role as *interim President and CEO of IHRSA*. He was so encouraging, supportive, kind and willing to assist in any way that he could. It was very genuine and heartfelt.



C.I. - In your opinion, what has Norm meant to the health and fitness club industry?

BD - Norm is truly one of the founding fathers of our beloved trade Association. It is not an exaggeration to say that IHRSA would not exist without his foresight, fortitude and passion for the industry. Collectively, we owe a great debt to his contributions that have spanned over 40 years!

C.I. - Please express a birthday wish to Norm.

BD - Rest assured, you continue to build upon the legacy you have created in this industry we love so much.

Comments From John McCarthy**Comments From John McCarthy, 25-Year Executive Director Emeritus of IHRSA, Health and Fitness Club Industry Colleague and Friend**

Club Insider (C.I.) - When, where and how did you meet Norm?

John McCarthy (JM) - Norm was the First President of IHRSA, and he was invaluable to me in getting IHRSA off to a fast and sure start... During his Presidency, we talked for 15 to 30 minutes every Friday morning... He always had good ideas and was always encouraging... He laid the foundation for IHRSA, and did so magnificently.



C.I. - Please share a fond memory you have of or with Norm.

JM - Norm taught me one thing that was invaluable.... Namely, that it's possible (and desirable) to work hard and have a good time... at the same time... That really is a magnificent quality, and Norm has it in spades... He always has, always will be a unique leader in that regard.

C.I. - In your opinion, what has Norm meant to the health and fitness club industry?

JM - Norm set IHRSA on a good and solid foundation and I credit that to his open mind and open heart... There's not a narrow-minded or narrow-hearted bone in his body.

C.I. - Please express a birthday wish to Norm.

JM - My birthday wish for Norm is to share with him how much I admire and thank him for being an inspiration and guide to me as he has also been to countless others.

...Norm Cates, Jr.

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to become Great Characters, so instead, I created another annual event to specially honor them, thus *THE Legendary Ladies of Atlanta* was born. Sadly, like so many other events around the world, though, the 2020 events were canceled. But, they will be back in 2021!

So, through the years, I've always figured out ways to mix **FUN** into all I've done during my life, and this was one of the best ways ever!

C.I. - Well, speaking of **FUN**, in every *Edition of Club Insider*, we have published a small ad that says three simple words: **Make It Fun!** Please explain why we do this and the importance of *Making It Fun in clubs*.

NC - Let me explain it this way for club owners, operators and employees. Because of the devastation caused by the pandemic, this has become even more of an important thing for people to focus on than in the past! Folks, whatever you do... **DO NOT FORGET** that, in order for your business to be successful, it must be **CHOSEN** by someone when they're thinking of what they're going to do during their day.

Your club is up against a huge amount of competition for their time. That means that, whenever they go to your club and they do not have an enjoyable time, *they very possibly might not come back!* And, if they do not come back because you or someone who represents you have not treated them in a respectful, nice and friendly manner, *you are in trouble, and you may not even know it!*

So, as we progress into this New Year, 2021, I urge you to have staff meetings where all you do is **discuss customer relations** and **generate new ideas** about

how you can get better at the job of **Making It Fun**. **YES... Making It Fun is a job, and it will put more money in your pocket!**

By the way, here is a **free tip**. As we move out of the pandemic, and gatherings become safe again, it will be time to welcome back not only members but their friends and family! Like the **Member Appreciation Parties** of old, **new Welcome Back Parties** should become a monthly staple at your facility or each of your facilities (if more than one). For years and years, I had **Member Appreciation Parties** once a month in all of my clubs... not once a year but once a month! During each, members would bring their best friends. Compared to various marketing vehicles, the cost really is minimal and not significant when compared to the possible results of the effort.

I get it; things will continue to be different for a while. But, as people begin to trust that things are becoming safer, a since of normalcy will prevail again, and people will be itching for a great event. Become that event in their life, each month, and this will lead to their wanting to be with you daily.

But, **importantly**, until the pandemic is declared '**OVER**', follow all safety protocols and provide masks for as long as attendees feel more comfortable wearing them than not. Masks will be a reality for months into vaccine delivery, but it will not be forever. Like any other barrier to a sale, tear it down to get a prospect to say, '**Yes.**' Create comfort, caring and a place to be.

You Did Something Right

C.I. - Along the way, you have received some wonderful honors, including *IHRSA's 2000 Dale Dibble Distinguished Service Award* and *Club Industry's 2017 Lifetime Achievement Award*. So, you clearly did something right! How does this make you feel?

Make It Fun!

NC - **Happy. Honored. Grateful and Thankful.** I am **Dedicated and Committed to the industry.** And, I am **willing to do almost anything to help all in our industry.**

C.I. - In closing what has been a truly monumental interview, I'd like you to share the top three lessons you have for anyone reading this. It could be someone just entering this industry, or someone who has been in the industry as long as you (47 years).

NC - Absolutely, they are:

1. Never, ever walk into the front door of your club without first briefly pausing for a moment to start your day with a quick *Thank You To God for blessing you* with the members and guests you have to serve that day and the staff you have to help serve them.
2. Treat your members like the **MOST IMPORTANT PEOPLE THERE ARE IN YOUR ENTIRE LIFE...** because **THEY ARE!**
3. Never, ever, ever, and I mean ever, let a member or employee leave while they're mad at you.

■ ■ ■

I want to thank my Dad, **Norm Cates, Jr.**, for his time interviewing for this cover story, not to mention his 47 years of dedicated service to the health and fitness club industry! **Happy 75th Birthday, Dad!**

Folks, because of space limitations, there were some stories that just didn't make the cut. However, we still want to share them with you, so if you'd like more stories and some lessons sprinkled in throughout, go to clubinsideronline.com/norm-cates-story.

Thank you also to **Russell Marchione, Robert White, Pat Nolte, Rick Caro, John McCarthy, Brent Darden, Pamela Kufahl and John Gormley** for their comments and birthday wishes (Feel free to submit your own directly to Norm by email at Norm@clubinsideronline.com). Finally, thank you to **our readers** for taking the time to read this story. I hope it has been entertaining, informational and beneficial.

(Justin Cates is the Publisher of Club Insider. Having been born into a club business family in 1985, Justin grew up in the health and fitness club industry. He has lived and breathed this industry for 35 years, since his own day one, and he loves it dearly. Graduating from the Terry College of Business at The University of Georgia in 2007, Justin has run day-to-day operations of Club Insider for 12 years. Justin was elevated to Publisher of Club Insider on April 5, 2020. Justin's Dad, Norm Cates, continues to serve as Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993. You can reach Justin by phone at 863-999-2677 or email at Justin@clubinsideronline.com.)

Comments From Pamela Kufahl**Comments From Pamela Kufahl, Director of Content for Club Industry, Health and Fitness Club Industry Colleague and Friend**

Club Insider (C.I.) - When, where and how did you meet Norm?

Pamela Kufahl (PK) - If I remember correctly, I met Norm for the first time at the *Club Industry Show* about 18 years ago. I remember him walking in the door of the press room for a press briefing by one of the suppliers. He was wearing his black cowboy hat, and I thought, this guy looks like an interesting character. Boy, was that first impression correct!



C.I. - Please share a fond memory you have of or with Norm. **PK** - I remember giving Norm our *Lifetime Achievement Award* a few years ago. I was sitting with him at the table prior to the award presentation, and a lot of people were coming up to the table to congratulate him. He seemed so honored to be getting the award, and maybe a bit nervous about getting up on stage, although he did a great job in his speech.

C.I. - In your opinion, what has Norm meant to the health and fitness club industry?

PK - As I said when I gave him the award, *I feel like Norm has been the conscience of the industry*, speaking out about club operators who are doing things that reflect poorly on the rest of the industry. His down-home writing style makes you feel like you are having a conversation with an old friend.

C.I. - Please express a birthday wish to Norm.

PK - I wish you all the best on your 75th birthday, Norm! You've always been a friend to *Club Industry* and to the club industry. Thank you for all you do!

Comments From John Gormley**Comments From John Gormley, Local Atlanta-area Friend**

Club Insider (C.I.) - When, where and how did you meet Norm?

John Gormley (JG) - I met Norm in August of 1995 in Costa Rica.



C.I. - Please share a fond memory you have of or with Norm. **JG** - I had knee surgery in August 2017, and Norm was my care giver. He took me there and waited for me, then he took me to your house to stay one night and eat your Mom's great lunch. However, we never had lunch. On my way from the car to the house, on crutches, I got dizzy and almost fainted. Your Mom called 911, and an ambulance came to take me to Kennestone Hospital. Norm followed in his Beemer with flashers on and kept up.

The Paramedic told the EMT to stop, and they told him to quit following and just meet at the hospital. He still followed... but with no flashers this time! I spent 27 hours in the hospital and had a \$28,000 physical, including a brain MRI, because they thought I had a stroke.

While I was there, Norm kept calling and checking on me. The next day, three doctors came in my room and told me I was okay and nothing was wrong. They told me I had a reaction to my anesthesia. So, Norm came back, picked me up, and went to his house and had that lunch. I spent the night, and all was good!

Morale of the story: Norm is a **Champion** and great friend! Justin, you are a lucky man to be his son.

C.I. - Please express a birthday wish to Norm.

JG - Happy Birthday Big Brother!

Ten Things Every Fitness Center Operator Must Do Moving Into 2021

By: Bonnie Patrick Mattalian

Newsflash: The fitness industry is on the precipice of becoming an integral part of people's lives once again. Opportunities abound, and savvy operators are embracing the alternatives in the industry's evolution. With a careful assessment of the current situation and the development of multiple strategies, here is a structured process to consider for businesses to succeed in 2021:

1. Frame Your Decisions with Strategic Thinking - First, look at the cycle of development your fitness business was in pre-pandemic. What was the health of your operations before and during the crisis? This will give you a jumping-off point to begin your assessment.

2. Clarify the Customer Experience and Market Demand - Right now, one of the most significant pain points I hear from operators is that usage is down.

We are missing the mark on creating holistic, curated experiences based on our consumers' current needs. And, there is an opportunity for better communication and engagement through Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Who was your fitness customer? What are their preferences now? What experience/service/products are they looking for, and how do they want that delivered?

What we as consumers cared about in February is not what we care about now.

Probe market demographic and psychographic analytics to see what has changed versus pre-pandemic. Assess the target market *outside* of your membership database. There are only one or two data aggregators out there that have this information available in real-time. Look at the 80% of the inactive population who needs to come in to your center. What does that look like in your market? What are the new things that consumers most care about and drive their buying behaviors now?

Your customer base may likely have changed. In some cases, it may have grown. In others, there needs to be an adjustment looking at new customer sources. Where are they? How can you best connect and engage with customers now? Their behaviors and expectations have changed. Your service delivery, programs and communications need to mirror your market's changes.

3. Retool Your Program Offerings - Be wary of discounting populations who may be timid about exercising, such as seniors. In fact, they need to be moving more so than any other group. Programs need to be tailored to their particular health needs, in the end, helping to improve immunity.

In my opinion, fitness and community centers need to embrace this opportunity to become more clinically integrated. Yet, this must be done strategically and executed well. Promote

exercise as a primary prevention tool to improve immunity and cost-effective treatment option for people with chronic illnesses. Understand how to best align with providers. Include a Medical Advisory Board or Committee as part of your organizational structure.

Program delivery can and should be done both in-person and virtually. There are multiple providers out there who have these solutions ready to go, including clinically integrated offerings and wellness specific programming. I'm happy to talk with you about those that I think are most effective. Partner now so that you can establish relationships more deeply within your communities during the winter.

4. Identify KPIs and Benchmarks - Identify new KPIs and benchmarks for success. Customer engagement should be high on the list. Contact MXM for a proven tracking solution. Identify resources and processes for data collection and trending. How will you collect customer feedback to ensure you are on track? This should be fast and easy, with an opportunity for feedback with every customer interaction.

Did you notice on election night how all of the commentators had data to the *single voter in a particular county* at their fingertips? They provided instant analytics and predictions based on the data they saw in real-time. Imagine being able to do the same thing at your center. If you do not have a dedicated data analyst in place, I strongly recommend looking at this resource's value to your organization. This role is much more than a Membership Management System SME.

5. Map Out Resource Requirements - To provide the desired experiences and programs to your new market, what are the resources that are now needed?

The business of the future will become increasingly reliant on AI. That's not to say that technology replaces any of our teams, but instead, it helps them to scale the experiences for our members. Invest now in substantial upgrades for data management and enhance the in-person experience with multiple virtual options.

How well do you understand your Membership Management software or your Customer Management software? Do you use it to its fullest extent every single day, analyzing trends and reacting in real-time? If not, approach your software provider now. Get up to speed on better understanding your customers and your business through the data you already have at hand.

Utilize AI to enhance customer communications. Frequent, individualized participant and prospect communications are a business imperative for ongoing engagement and retention. Stay connected with the JCCA and the late **Stephen Tharrett** and **Mark Williamson's ClubIntel** for the latest benchmarking trending data.

6. Identify Business Goals and Funding Needs - Create assumptions with a zero-based budget to support the strategies

above, considering seasonality and the potential for additional closures or partial closures. Use multiple options to help look at realities in each case study and plan for additional capital and operational cash needs.

Perceptive business operators are diversifying offerings in the event of additional full or partial closures. Solutions can include retail and online product sales, and obviously, virtual classes and workshops. Begin clubs-within-a-club meet-up groups and sessions. And, I always ensure there are holistic, clinical and lifestyle in-person and virtual programs to attract non-members and engage current members.

7. Embark Upon Long-Term Scenario Planning - A critical step for long-term planning is to participate in scenario forecasting. Typically, this is a process that will take three to four months. The stakeholder group will discuss what influencing factors might be present in three, five or ten years. These elements can include demographics, communication, environment, culture and society, technology, health, politics, housing, transportation and the like. Usually, four or five final scenarios are presented with potential implications to identify long term organizational goals. Include upsides and downturns since we will likely see a bit of both over the coming months and years.

McKinsey & Co. has several excellent templates and articles to support scenario planning. I always secure feedback on my scenarios from multiple peer executives or industry consultants. The JCCA has been instrumental in leading this charge.

8. Clarify Roles, Responsibilities, Outcomes - The chances are good that your organizational structure has now completely changed. After eliminating many positions, build new roles to ensure the fulfillment of ongoing safety requirements.

Map out every step of interactions within the customer experience. Who and what is needed when, where, how and why to reach your full potential. Develop outcomes and accountabilities for each role. Measure success and identify areas to fulfill any needs for additional training or support. As roles evolve, so should your team. The current talent pool is quite deep, eclectic and willing.

9. Give Your Team TLC - Our teams are shellshocked. Likely only some of your staff have returned. Everyone is juggling work, home, family and health. Their lives are not the same by any stretch of the imagination.

Jobs have changed. Pressure and stressors from work and home weigh more heavily on workers. Managers should be spending time listening and providing emotional support. A happy workforce will help our members to stay engaged and productive.

Consider offering structured employee wellness programs for your teams.



Bonnie Patrick Mattalian

And, don't forget to have fun and laugh. I like bringing in guest speakers via Zoom or in-person to help lift teams with frequency, especially now.

10. Work Together - The pandemic has made the world a smaller place. We are working together towards a common goal: *Improving the health of our communities.*

Reach out to your associates around the country. Learn and evolve together. Join your state's fitness alliance. Attend any of the countless webinars weekly on case studies and best practices. Work LinkedIn.

Many commercial fitness organizations are already diversifying their business model and changing their footprint, strategy and service delivery. The operators who evolve and diversify will make it through these next crucial six months and will be ahead of the pack as we come out on the other side of this crisis.

Summary

The disruptive normal will be with us for a while. Every market has seen a change in its customer profile. Those businesses that shift gears to accommodate the current customer needs in a fiscally sound way while staying loyal to their differentiated brand will continue to thrive.

Keep your finger on the pulse of your market, and customers will remain engaged, even in tough times.

This is a time for transformation. Let's work together to recreate our industry as we provide our essential services to improve our communities' health.

(Bonnie Patrick Mattalian is an independent consultant who builds high-performance teams and businesses in the health and wellness industry. Her focus is on understanding fitness consumer insights and behaviors and linking those needs to operational strategies to deliver customer-centric experiences. Contact Bonnie by email at bmattalian@gmail.com or LinkedIn at www.linkedin.com/in/bonniepatrickmattalian/.)

New Lessons in Design Learned From the Pandemic

By: Bruce Carter

COVID-19 has affected every aspect of club operations and planning. The initial reaction of Governments related to clubs was understandable: Close everything, ensuring that no one could get COVID in a club. Many other types of businesses faced the same fate. Then, clubs quickly became proactive with better cleaning practices, social distancing with equipment and individuals, masks, temperature scanning and better filters for HVAC systems.

COVID has been a dramatic "game changer," one that, up until this time, has never been experienced by the industry. It appears that many Governmental entities, without much supporting data, felt more (and continued) restrictions were better. A club's environment was in question for safety, and no matter what a club did, it often seemed not to be enough. Yet, as a result of COVID, clubs and (businesses in general) are starting to learn new lessons from what they initially did to make their environments safe. Now, with vaccines becoming available in the near future, clubs will get back to some kind of "new normal," and these new lessons will shape the future of club design and operations.

The first thing that clubs quickly incorporated was increased cleaning practices. Hand sanitizers, wiping down everything with wipes and spraying hard surfaces with disinfectant have proven to be invaluable in making people feel safe, yet different studies promote that the virus gets transmitted more as an airborne pathogen and not so much from touching surfaces. The jury still seems to be out; however, it can be assumed that clubs will continue their new levels of cleaning practices, but probably not to the extent they do so now.

Yet, one side effect that will have to be dealt with in the future is the added amount of cleaning chemicals that are in a space. In addition, one of the things that has been strongly promoted is the use of antimicrobial finishes and materials. These surfaces resist bacteria but are covered with strong chemicals to do so. As a result, a number of the major architectural firms are no longer specifying such surfaces, and many health care systems, such as Kaiser Permanente, have banned such materials.

So, the question becomes: What can be done with increased chemicals used to fight an increase of viruses? The answer relates to one of the most significant things a club can do to achieve a healthier environment, and this will have a strong impact on future club new design and renovations. This is the HVAC system. Existing clubs have added UV filters and other types of filters, such as the new HEPA or MERV-13 filter to better remove

bacteria and viruses from the air. Adding an advanced air cleaning unit and/or air purification device to an existing unit can increase the ability to collect pollutants from indoor air and how much air it draws through the cleaning or filtering element (expressed in cubic feet per minute). To get the optimal setup requires dealing with a HVAC professional to determine necessary system changes.

In addition, in rethinking air-filtration systems, clubs should look into operable windows. This, when designed with air-filtration systems, will bring more fresh air into spaces. The advantage of operable windows is that they not only bring in fresh air and dilute the airborne contaminants that pass from person to person, but they give the occupants of a space a greater feeling of safety. It is also recommended to reverse ceiling fans to mitigate polluted air.

Whatever the norm was for air movement and ventilation prior to COVID, assume that new systems will have up to 50% or more capability in achieving safer air quality.

The second lesson learned is that adding outdoor space can be a powerful asset to a club now and in the future. However, it is understood that adding outdoor exercise options are not available to most clubs due to restrictions of space, landlord restrictions and accessibility. Obviously, weather plays a strong role and feedback from different clubs is that the usage of outdoor space dropped noticeably when indoor space became available. Historically, outdoor exercise space has not been in strong demand when indoor space was available, yet COVID may change this dynamic. The lesson is that, if a club has the space outdoors, it should pursue programming options for the space, ideally making sure the space is covered, safe and exciting.

Doing push-ups in a parking lot next to an old Buick won't do in a post-COVID club offering. Probably, large multi-purpose clubs with available and accessible land are best able to optimize this option and any club that can provide such a well-planned-out offering should have a competitive advantage. One note to consider is that, where parking space is utilized for outdoor exercise, landlords are also requesting additional insurance coverage from the club for anyone who may get hurt in an area not covered in the club's policy.

Another asset for a club now and in the future is to implement biophilic design elements. Studies have shown that humans have an instinctual desire with nature (known as biophilia) and that plants (indoors or outdoors) helps people feel calm and relaxed. Plants typically have

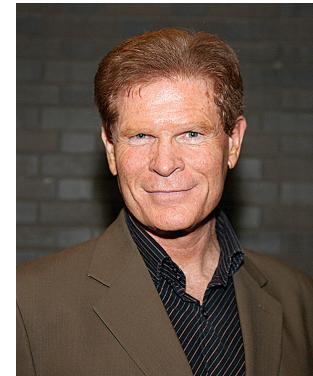
been used minimally in clubs, one reason being it is difficult to keep plants looking vibrant and healthy. If you work with a professional, they can best provide the proper indoor plant and tree offerings and the necessary ongoing upkeep.

The cost is worth the wonderful effect they have in dealing with the effects of COVID. They help to purify the air, add beauty to a space, absorb sound, reduce stress by making a space "feel" safer and overall add to the positive experience people are looking for in being in a club. Clubs of the future will have different areas of "plantscapes" as a key focal point (such as in the center of a workout area). Pandemics cause people to go into nature to feel safer, and adding nature to an indoor environment adds to the favorable effect someone feels when in a club.

Another lesson that was known but is now more at the forefront is because of the increased cleaning practices, it is more important than ever to select materials and finishes that are durable enough (and continue to look good) to withstand intense cleaning regimens. Also, designers need to make sure the spaces they design are easily accessible for cleaning, such as hard to reach spots. Even janitor closets in the future should be bigger because the role of cleaning will be more important than ever in a post-COVID world.

Obviously, wherever possible, touchless options will be the norm, and no new club will be built without touchless toilets, urinals, sinks, point of purchase stations, etc. Even doors entering into locker rooms will become a thing of the past.

One last thing that needs to increase as a result of COVID is communication. Communication of all of the things a club does to make for a safer,



Bruce Carter

more enjoyable environment need to be regularly communicated. Everything that a club does has to be communicated by email, attractive signage, club monitors, website and word-of-mouth. No one will ever see an advanced ventilation or air filter system, but they sure need to know about it. And, this needs to be an ongoing communication.

• • •

Safety has never been a key selling point, but COVID has changed that. Clubs in the future will be looked at by their programs, facilities, service and safety. Providing a wonderful, safe experience of excitement, inspiration and variety will once again make clubs the best option for many millions to improve their lives.

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

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IRS Makes it Easier to Set Up Payment Agreements; Offers Other Relief to Taxpayers Struggling With Tax Debts

By: Kristen Deazeley

The Internal Revenue Service recently announced a number of changes designed to help struggling taxpayers impacted by COVID-19 more easily settle their tax debts with the IRS.

The IRS assessed its collection activities to see how it could apply relief for taxpayers who owe but are struggling financially because of the pandemic, expanding taxpayer options for making payments and alternatives to resolve balances owed.

"The IRS understands that many taxpayers face challenges, and we're working hard to help people facing issues paying their tax bills," said *IRS Commissioner, Chuck Rettig*. "Following up on our *People First Initiative* earlier this year, this next phase of our efforts will help with further taxpayer relief efforts."

"We want people to know our IRS employees are committed to continue helping taxpayers wherever possible, including offering many options for those struggling to pay their tax bills," said *Darren Guillot, IRS Small Business/Self-Employed Deputy Commissioner for Collection and Operations Support*. Guillot discussed the new relief options in a new edition of IRS' *A Closer Look*.

Taxpayers who owe always had options to seek help through payment plans and other tools from the IRS, but

the new IRS Taxpayer Relief Initiative is expanding on those existing tools even more. The revised COVID-related collection procedures will be helpful to taxpayers, especially those who have a record of filing their returns and paying their taxes on time. Among the highlights of the Taxpayer Relief Initiative:

- Taxpayers who qualify for a short-term payment plan option may now have up to 180 days to resolve their tax liabilities instead of 120 days.

- The IRS is offering flexibility for some taxpayers who are temporarily unable to meet the payment terms of an accepted *Offer in Compromise*.

- The IRS will automatically add certain new tax balances to existing *Installment Agreements*, for individual and out of business taxpayers. This taxpayer-friendly approach will occur instead of defaulting the agreement, which can complicate matters for those trying to pay their taxes.

- To reduce burden, certain qualified individual taxpayers who owe less than \$250,000 may set up *Installment Agreements* without providing a financial statement or substantiation if their monthly payment proposal is sufficient.

- Some individual taxpayers who only owe

for the 2019 tax year and who owe less than \$250,000 may qualify to set up an *Installment Agreement* without a notice of federal tax lien filed by the IRS.

- Additionally, qualified taxpayers with existing *Direct Debit Installment Agreements* may now be able to use the *Online Payment Agreement (OPA)* system to propose lower monthly payment amounts and change their payment due dates.

Additional Details on the Taxpayer Relief Initiative

The IRS offers options for short-term and long-term payment plans, including *Installment Agreements* via the *Online Payment Agreement (OPA)* system. In general, this service is available to individuals who owe \$50,000 or less in combined income tax, penalties and interest or businesses that owe \$25,000 or less combined that have filed all tax returns. The short-term payment plans are now able to be extended from 120 to 180 days for certain taxpayers.

Installment Agreement options are available for taxpayers who cannot fully pay their balance but can pay their balance over time. The IRS expanded *Installment Agreement* options to remove the requirement for financial statements and substantiation in more circumstances for balances owed up to \$250,000 if the monthly payment proposal is sufficient. The IRS also modified *Installment Agreement* procedures to further limit requirements for Federal Tax Lien determinations for some taxpayers who only owe for tax year 2019. In addition to payment plans and *Installment Agreements*, the IRS offers additional tools to assist taxpayers who owe taxes:

Temporarily Delaying Collection - Taxpayers can contact the IRS to request a temporary delay of the collection process. If the IRS determines a taxpayer is unable to pay, it may delay collection until the taxpayer's financial condition improves.

Offer in Compromise - Certain taxpayers qualify to settle their tax bill for less than the amount they owe by submitting an *Offer in Compromise*. To help determine eligibility, use the *Offer in Compromise Pre-Qualifier* tool. Now, the IRS is offering additional flexibility for some taxpayers who are temporarily unable to meet the payment terms of an accepted offer in compromise.

Relief From Penalties - The IRS is highlighting reasonable cause assistance available for taxpayers with failure to file, pay and deposit penalties. First-time



Kristen Deazeley

penalty abatement relief is also available for the first time a taxpayer is subject to one or more of these tax penalties.

All taxpayers can access important information on [IRS.gov](https://irs.gov). Many taxpayers requesting payment plans, including *Installment Agreements*, can apply through [IRS.gov](https://irs.gov) without ever having to talk to a representative.

Other requests, including this new relief, can be made by contacting the number on the taxpayer's notice or responding in writing. However, to request relief, the IRS reminds taxpayers they must be responsive when they receive a balance due notice.

"If you're having a tax issue, don't go silent. Please don't ignore the notice arriving in your mailbox," Guillot said. "These problems don't get better with time. We understand tax issues and know that dealing with the IRS can be intimidating, but our employees really are here to help."

Throughout COVID-19, the IRS has continued to adjust operations to help ensure the health and safety of employees and taxpayers, including the extensive and temporary relief of the *IRS People First Initiative*. More information and background on the collection relief and procedures can be found in *A Closer Look*.

"While it's been important for us and the nation to resume our critical tax compliance responsibilities, we continue to assess the wide-ranging impacts of COVID-19 and other difficulties people are experiencing," Guillot said.

(Kristen Deazeley is a Public Affairs Specialist at the Internal Revenue Service, and she can be reached by email at Kristen.K.Deazeley@irs.gov.)



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“Non-Essential” Never Again

By: Eric Durak, MSc

Part III

Recent events around coronavirus will have a lingering effect on the health club industry; however, there are questions that people are asking now that need to be addressed, as the COVID-19 pandemic is, at its core, as much political as it is epidemiological.

The first comes from journalist Michael Barone who asks the question last week in the *Washington Examiner* if the lockdowns were worth it. His response was: No. He states eloquently that, in the history of infectious disease, at no other time were healthy people quarantined for an outbreak, including the Asian flu and Hong Kong flu. The nature of treating healthy people as “sick until proven healthy” is similar to the adage of “guilty until proven innocent.” Your back is to the wall from the outset. It is also not the way we do things in this country, or at least it’s not the way we used to do them.

The concept of sick until proven healthy is a non-sequitur, as it doesn’t take into consideration all of the elements of health promotion, testing and assessments, diagnosis and symptomatology. In fitness, it would be akin to stating that everyone who comes into a health club has no fitness level to start just because they were not assessed. We know this is not correct. Unless afflicted by a high-level disease, many people have some level of innate fitness level, whether it’s aerobic fitness, strength or range of motion. Testing aside, with infectious disease, it is symptomology above all else that has historically been the foundation of treatment. You’re sick; you stay home. The sad state of our health in the U.S. is that the average adult American has 2 - 3 colds per year. It is testament to

how important physical activity and nutrition are regarding maintaining high level health.

The Politics of Health

The COVID-19 issue has brought to light the highly charged political nature of a person’s health. I’m sure there are health and fitness professionals at every level who have their opinions regarding where we are with regards to dealing with this virus, how it started and its veracity, but my response to those who look to vaccines or other medicines is that, from the early onset of the diagnosis of this virus (MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, TX diagnosed the first cases in Texas back in October of 2019), is that 100% of persons who have recovered from COVID-19 (and that number is 99.96%) have done so through natural immunity. Forget about the concept of herd immunity, as it has been taken out of context by the pharmaceutical industry. The need for any intervention at this time for the majority of persons may not be warranted.

So, where do we stand? The most basic is to strengthen or maintain the health of the immune system through super foods and supplements, healthy eating and exercise. I detailed the benefits of exercise in my previous article.

Some Health Clubs WERE Open

In a surprise report again from the *Washington Examiner*, club owners in the San Francisco Bay Area are fuming in the first week of September as it became known that Government gyms remained open this summer while California health clubs were closed, then reopened in June, then shut down again. This is a calculated political move that I believe strengthens

the assertion that closing certain business around the nation had less to do with public safety and more to do with lobbying and political favors. This situation should prompt health club owners, club associations and fitness professionals to contact their elected representatives immediately to have them work towards opening clubs immediately (based on this information). I would suggest that health clubs have Zoom conferences and calls to representatives and discuss some of the current issues regarding the safety, benefits and ramifications of keeping health clubs as essential businesses, from medical fitness to nutrition programs to social aspects to improving overall health; it is a perfect time to push the narrative of “essential business” of consumer-based clubs (injecting the aspects that government clubs have remained open).

Lastly, the political aspects of health have spilled into the nutritional realm as well. Over the past half-decade, I have read more and more media reports on the issues or problems with things like herbs, supplements and specific nutritional programs. I have written letters to many publications stating that the use of supplements and specific food plans is about improving health (and now fighting disease) as opposed to discussions regarding regulation status or expensive urine.

Medicine has taken this one step further. A report from Germany highlights the use of substances called antivitamins, which change the molecular structure of a substance to block the action of a naturally occurring vitamin (in this case, vitamin B1). They are using this antivitamin to block bacteria that are resistant to antibiotics. Their solution? Negate the action of a vitamin instead of using another substance that would improve the gut biome and



Eric Durak, MSc

improve the ability to fight bacterial infections (such as garlic, honey, ginger and echinacea). This research, and other reports against vitamins is telling as to the direction that medicine is going. Judging by the response to the current coronavirus issue; it’s not going in the right direction.

This is why we need fitness and nutrition more than ever. The need to change the physiological direction of persons from all perspectives may lie more heavily on the fitness profession very quickly. The question is: Are they up for the challenge?

To view the list of References for this article, please go to bit.ly/clubinsider101.

(Eric Durak, MSc is President of Medical Health and Fitness in California. His clinical exercise career spans over 30 years with dozens of medical conditions, and he has been fortunate enough to publish in many high impact medical journals. He can be reached at Edurak@medhealthfit.com.)

Your Menu of Services: A Recommendation About Recommendations

By: Jeffrey Pinkerton

Great restaurants have small and selective menus. Having a well-curated and thoughtful menu ensures that guests will be able to navigate the offerings and make an informed decision. It also increases the likelihood that the staff have tried everything on the menu and can speak to their experience. On the other hand, a large menu of entrees in a restaurant, or a large menu of options in a health club, is difficult to manage, challenging to market, tough to quality control and impossible for staff

to experience in full. If your team struggles to make strong recommendations to every member who walks through your door, I have a recommendation...

A menu that is too large often becomes challenging to navigate and may leave consumers overwhelmed. In Chip and Dan Heath’s book, *Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard*, the authors describe change and choice framework as a person riding an elephant down a path. The process of changing our habits and making decisions becomes a combination of our rational

brain (the *Rider*), our emotional brain (the *Elephant*) and our situation or environment (the *Path*).

To make a change, we either need to appeal to our rational brain and direct the Rider, spark our emotion and influence the Elephant, or make the path clearer and shape the Path. When presented with too many choices, too many options for the Rider and too many possible Paths to go down, the Rider often becomes paralyzed and does nothing. In the world of health and fitness, too many options and too many decisions may lead to someone making

no decision at all and not returning to your facility.

On special occasions, my wife and I like to visit the Stoney River Steakhouse a short drive away. We don’t go often, just a handful of times really for a few landmark wedding anniversaries and what my friend calls “speed limit birthdays,” the ones that coincide with speed limit signs: 35, 40, 45, etc. For our 20th wedding anniversary, we were there drinking wine and discussing our life raising four high-school-aged kids, and the waiter inquired if we were ready to order (See *Jeffrey Pinkerton Page 22*)

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our entrees. There are only a handful of options, even under the steak portion of the menu, and to be fair, my wife knew she was getting the Filet Mignon from the time we had made the reservations. "I think I'd like the Petite Filet, please," my wife responded to the waiter. "Excellent" he said. "And, how would you like that seasoned," he asked. "Hmmm," my wife paused and searched the menu for more clues. He added, "We have a signature blend of seasoning for all of our steaks, but depending on your liking, we can season the steak more lightly if you prefer."

The waiter had made a great recommendation on the wine and appetizers already, so my wife was quick to ask, "What do you recommend?" He replied, "Our traditional signature blend of seasoning is what we recommend. We've been serving amazing steaks for the past 15 years. It's our specialty, it's what we are known for, and I love them prepared just as the chef likes to prepare

them. My recommendation..." he paused maybe for the theater of the moment or maybe so he could add a smile to ensure the message was delivered lightheartedly, "My recommendation is that you take our recommendation." My wife smiled, laughed and agreed, his recommendation sounded lovely. And, he was right. The steak was excellent.

For your team to make confident recommendations and guide members into a great experience at your facility, you need a menu of services that is simple to navigate and easy to endorse. For example, in group fitness, how could anyone on your team be familiar with 100+ workouts of different formats and formulas? With too many choices, your team will be challenged to make confident recommendations and may find themselves like a waiter faced with an overwhelming twenty-page menu. Hopeless to make a strong recommendation, they are left to simply provide the unlikely (and untrustworthy) praise that, "everything is great!" Without a strong recommendation, combined with a confusing and cumbersome menu, some

members and prospective members may make no choice at all.

As the world continues to reboot and reopen in 2021, the ability to welcome back members and channel them into a great socially-connected experience is critical for their long-term success. And, as operators look to rebuild group fitness schedules and ramp up their menu of programming, now is a great time to evaluate all of your offerings to ensure you have programming that is high-quality, marketable, delivers an amazing experience and can service all ages, all fitness levels, men and women.

If you aren't sure whether you can make a confident recommendation about your group fitness programming, we'd love to share with you some of our recommendations. We've been helping club operators offer amazing group fitness experiences for over 20 years. It's our specialty; it's what we're known for, and I love the workouts, the marketing resources and the coaching advice we provide to help clubs attract more members and service more members, all to get more people moving! Our recommendation (smile)...



Jeffrey Pinkerton

is that you take our recommendation.
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To learn more about MOSSA, visit www.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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FROM FOOD TO FITNESS

Aaron Davis's story...

Aaron is a serial entrepreneur and experienced multi-unit franchisee owning 17 Little Caesars. He was looking for an opportunity to diversify his portfolio and has always been a fitness nut, so branching out into the fitness franchise segment was the logical next step. Food service operators know firsthand the challenges of the restaurant industry, which include high labor costs, extensive employee turnover and skyrocketing operating costs. Aaron was very impressed with the ease of operations and the need for only 3-4 employees to operate the club. After speaking with Workout Anytime franchisees, he was equally impressed that 73% own multiple units. Aaron leaned on Workout Anytime's proven franchise model to 'hit the ground running' and opened two locations within one year with a third on the way. Workout Anytime has more than tripled their club count over the past 5 years and have averaged 38% growth in new club openings.

"Adding fitness was a very profitable way to round out my business portfolio."

Aaron Davis, Owner
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