

Norm Cates'

CLUB INSIDER

CELEBRATING 28 YEARS OF TRUST

Stephen Tharrett

The Consummate Gentleman (1953 - 2020)



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CLUB INSIDER

CELEBRATING 28 YEARS OF TRUST

Stephen Tharrett

The Consummate Gentleman (1953 - 2020)

By: Justin Cates

Born January 14, 1953, a health and fitness club industry advocate and veteran, a leader, a legend, a mind, and a friend, **Stephen Tharrett**, passed away on December 22, 2020. Surviving him was his beloved wife, **Denise**, and their two children, **Alyssa** and **Travis**. As kind as he was brilliant, striving to make the industry a better place for us all, Stephen was *the consummate gentleman*.

As an author, I would love to say the words "consummate gentleman" were my idea, but that would not be true. As I read through the comments from Stephen's industry colleagues and friends that appear in this tribute, **John McCarthy** shared those words, and all of the subsequent comments

supported it as more than an anecdotal observation. It became clear it's more of a universal fact to all who knew him, worked with him, loved him. Additionally, and as the author of this tribute, my own experience with Stephen, working with him on various projects over the past decade, as well as catching up in person at conferences and trade shows, also supported those important words that become part of his legacy.

In recent years, with **Co-Founder and Co-Principal, Mark Williamson**, we have come to know ClubIntel as a truly valuable resource for industry data, forecasts and trends. They worked tirelessly to put out a staggering amount of content. But, that would not have been possible without Stephen's previous experiences.

From 1987 - 2004, Stephen served as a *Senior Vice President of ClubCorp*, charged with overseeing dozens of facilities across the country. Along the way, he served on the *IHRSA Board of Directors*, and further, as its *President* in 1996 - 97. Following his time at ClubCorp, in 2005, Stephen made the leap into consulting with *Club Industry Consulting*. A few years later, Stephen then made the interesting move in becoming *CEO* of the *Russian Fitness Group*, serving in that role from 2008 - 2010.

All of this experience led to the creation of ClubIntel in 2012. The old adage, "Knowledge is power," will always ring true, and Stephen's passion was to share that knowledge/power with all who were

(See **Stephen Tharrett** Page 8)



Stephen Tharrett

Where Do We Go From Here?

By: Justin Cates

The first U.S. cases of COVID-19 were diagnosed just over a year ago. The anniversary of the devastating lockdown is coming soon. And, yet, reported pandemic statistics are worse than ever. To that end, depending on the State, safety regulations and/or additional lockdowns still exist, further exacerbating what is already a nearly untenable situation. So, that begs the question: **Where Do We Go From Here?**

At the micro-level, you already know many of the steps you and other facilities across the country took to survive.

They have become the new reality as the industry continues to operate in the harshest of conditions. In time, many of these things will actually have a positive effect outside of the pandemic. Some could have a detrimental effect, and those will be a challenge for a future time. But, now, as best you can, many of you are setting yourself up to thrive once the pandemic is declared over, because we all believe there will be pent-up demand like we have never seen before. But, did it really have to be this way?

Zooming out to a wider view, at the macro-level, we failed, plain and simple. Our industry was lumped in with

bars/restaurants/other indoor uses and was shut down across the board. After the initial shutdown, as the second wave picked up steam, in strict states, shutdowns loomed again. For some, if they were to shutdown again, they would never re-open, so they defied orders and stayed open, bringing negative press coverage, fines and legal exposure along with it. For those who could sustain a second shutdown, it was back to square one or worse.

In short, much of what this industry has worked to achieve over many years has been lost, and it really will take years (See **Where Do We Go?** Page 14)



Justin Cates

Inside the Insider: Edition #326

- The "Insider Speaks" - A Letter From Laury Hammel
- "The Way We See The Problem Is The Problem" - **By:** Jim Thomas
- The Pain of Closing a Club and How to Do It Properly - **By:** Mike Alpert
- An Opinion Piece: Data Suspicion - **By:** Jeramy Fishel
- A Fork In the Road - **By:** Cathy Spencer Browning
- New Year, New IHRSA Initiatives
- Crunch Fitness Ranked a Top Franchise in Entrepreneur's Annual Franchise 500
- And, of Course, *Norm's Notes*

Norm's Notes

■ **Hello Everybody**, this is your Club Insider Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993 checking with our **326th** monthly edition!

■ **Is America a great country**, or what? As I sit here writing this Norm's Note on Friday, January 8, 2021, I've been thinking about and watching what's going on here in our beautiful America, and I have two comments: **GOD BLESS America!** And, **GOD HELP America!**

■ **Happy 36th Birthday** to my fine son and partner in Club Insider, **JUSTIN CATES!** As I write this Note, it is the day after his January 18th Birthday, and I've just got to tell you about what he's doing at this moment. At this time, Justin is preparing to board a jet from *New York City* back to his home in *Orlando, Florida*. You may be asking, "What's Justin doing in New York City?" Here's the answer, so read on. Over the past 24 hours, Justin has fulfilled one of his long-time bucket list items, and that is he got on an Amtrak Train near his home in Orlando, and he rode the train all day and all night all the way up the Eastern

United States to New York City, where he then spent six hours on the ground before he jumped on a Delta jet to fly home. So, even though we have a deadline for this edition later this week, Justin was able to successfully take this special Birthday Trip celebrating his 36th Birthday, and he's produced this edition right on time, exactly as scheduled! **WOW! What a GUY!**

■ Congratulations to our friend, **DARON ALLEN**, Co-Founder and CEO of **VFPnext**, for being named to **IHRSA's new Industry Partner Advisory Council**. Check out the **Press Release** beginning on **Page #18**, and see **VFPnext's Ad** on the **Opposite Page**.

■ **RED LERILLE**, my good friend for many moons, is a **LEGEND in his own time!** Red, who's now **85 years old**, was "Mr. America" in 1960. On January 13, 1963, in **Lafayette, Louisiana**, Red opened what is now a **200,000+ square-foot health club** on **22 acres** he calls **Red's**. Get this: Under one roof, Red's club has five fitness centers, five exercise studios, indoor and

outdoor tracks, a full-size basketball court, three indoor and 20 outdoor tennis courts, three racquetball courts and a regulation size boxing ring.

Congratulations to **RED and EMMA LERILLE** and their Team, because just last week, on January 13, 2021, Red's celebrated its **58th Anniversary!** **WOW!** Red still works at his club every day, and he works out every day! Red's kept his dedicated workout habits after being Mr. America over 60 year ago! The Red Lerille Story was *our earliest Club Insider Cover Story* back in our February 1994 Edition. I highly recommend that you download it from our Archives by going to www.clubinsideronline.com/archives.

I suggest that you take the time to read it because there's a lot there that will help you improve your club business(es). Red and his Team of 100 full-time and 50 part-time employees in the great southern City of Lafayette, Louisiana, work hard together to serve their 10,000+ members. How many of you know of a health and sports club that's over 50 years old? Much less one that's been in business 58 years!?

I've had the pleasure of visiting Red's amazing club twice. I was honored to spend the night at Red's lovely home with Red and Emma both times. Red's an early riser, normally waking at 4AM, and he personally opens his club long before the sun's up! Since I'm a former Air Force jet instructor pilot, a corporate pilot and an airline pilot, I was also very honored to have gone flying with Red in one of his vintage World War I biplanes. For years, one of Red's hobbies has been acquiring and rebuilding vintage airplanes for his collection. **Best of luck, RED and EMMA,**



Norm Cates

as ya'll celebrate your 58th year at Red's in the great city of Lafayette, Louisiana!

■ Folks, I'm pleased to be able to mention that we've had something really great and *amazing* happen this month! For 27 years, we would ship our print copies in the same month as what was written on the front cover. Over time, as the *Pre-Sorted Class* at the *United States Postal Service* became slower and slower, this would mean a *current edition* of Club Insider would arrive the *following month!* **That's not good!** So, beginning in January and concluding a six-month project by *now-Publisher, Justin Cates*, our January 2021 Edition was shipped in December 2020! Not only that, but for that edition, we received two-week mail service, when we have gotten used to three- to four-week delivery. *Congratulation Justin* on the completion of this project, and

(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!

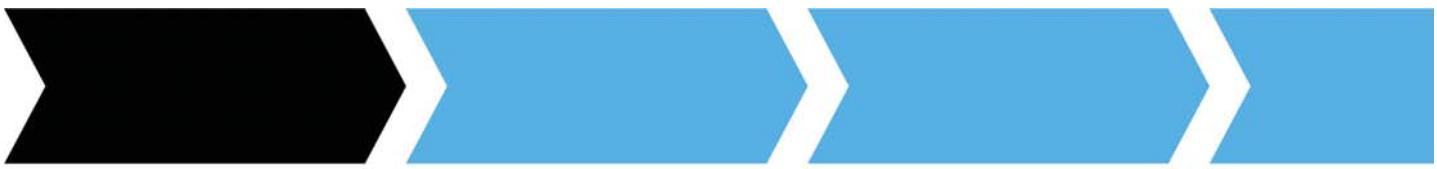
Last, but surely not least, this writer who refused to fear failure when many told him he didn't have a chance of surviving the publishing business for even a year did survive. And, he would like to give his sincere **Thanks and Appreciation** to the power that made that survival happen: **God**.

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

Norm Cates, Jr.

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The “Insider Speaks”

A Letter From Laury Hammel

Dear Norm and Justin,

Congratulations on the excellent hat trick of interviews about the **Schwartz Family** and their iconic business, *Midtown Athletic Club*. You were exactly right when you warned readers about the length and

promised us that it was well worth the time to read the whole thing. I read every single word (although it took me three of my favorite flavored sparkling waters), and I learned much I didn't know about this fine family and their successful business. I personally have gained much from their

wisdom, know-how and essential truths of prosperous entrepreneurship.

It was special to digest a dynamic father-son combo from *Club Insider* interviewing members of three generations of a legendary family-owned business: **Alan, Steve and Alex Schwartz**. I am also part of a family-owned business. My father and mother managed the *Salt Lake Tennis Club* in the '50s and '60s and transformed it from a historic tennis club to one that included swimming. I now proudly own it and will soon be celebrating its **110th year** of serving the tennis and swimming community. My children grew up at my Boston area clubs, and my two sons have also worked at the club. To see how well the four generations of the Schwartz family work together and to read about the insights and lessons learned in a multi-generation family business was inspirational and instructional.

As pointed out in the interview with Steve, my business partner, **Myke Farricker**, and I have leased a facility from Midtown in Natick, MA for 36 years. I can attest to the integrity and collaborative spirit of the Schwartz family as they've supported us through good times and rocky times. I've known Alan Schwartz for 41 years and Steve for nearly two decades, and these two men have formed an extraordinary team.

As **Kevie Schwartz** shared with Alan early on:

“The third thing he told me was: ‘If you ever want to get anywhere, you've got to be willing to delegate because you can't do it all yourself; you've got to have a team.’”

It is standard for the Schwartz family ethos to give credit where credit is due. Giving a shout out to current and former Midtown leaders like **Doug Cash, Spike Gonzales** and **Debra Siena** is impressive. These three pioneers in our industry and other current and former Midtown leaders continue to make a big impact, whether continuing to be on the Midtown team or having moved on.

I also want to thank and acknowledge the Schwartz family for building what some call a “Legacy Business” that stands the test of time. The Schwartz family made the conscious decision to build something that lasts and to make a positive impact on people's lives every day. We have seen others in our industry whose only concern was to maximize profits without much care for their community or have built a business so they can flip it and leave with a tidy profit. Neither of these strategies have proven to be successful in the health club industry in the long term.

The part of the interview where Steve speaks about the steps that Midtown has taken to survive and thrive even during



Laury Hammel

the pandemic was profound. This strategy for handling a health and economic crisis serves as a handbook for us all to find opportunities in the middle of difficulties. My hat is off to Steve and the Midtown team.

So many great things were shared about the Schwartz family, but I want to emphasize even more the essence of what really makes Midtown move from good to great on my **“Community Impact Scale.”** When Kevie shared with Alan his secrets to life-long happiness and success, he said:

“In defining yourself, be sure you are more than just your job. It may be you as a contributor to society... you as a human being... it's NOT JUST YOUR JOB. Be a contributor, be a giver and not a taker so you will be proud and feel good about yourself.”

I can vouch for this attribute of the Schwartz family. Alan talked about his experience as a leader and the *Chair of the USTA*. As a proud member of the USTA for over sixty years and heavily engaged with the USTA all of my adult life, I can attest that he understated his impact. Alan Schwartz completely transformed the USTA in so many wonderful ways. I know Alan; if he feels strongly about something, his Yale Bulldoggeness comes out, and he harnesses his immense verbal and intellectual skills to get the job done or know the reason why. He spent over ten years of his life growing the game of tennis through his USTA leadership and dedication, and anyone who loves the game of tennis should thank Alan for his lifetime of unpaid service.

During the pandemic, several club owners have stepped up and dedicated hundreds of hours to bringing the club industry together to mitigate the damage done. Steve Schwartz was the leader who stood strong and successfully guided (See **The “Insider Speaks”** Page 7)

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...Norm's Notes

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thank you to Walton Press and USPS for getting *Club Insider* into the hands of our readers on time!

So, folks, I do *HOPE* you received your copy and that you have taken the time to read my very special January 2021 Cover Story, in which we *celebrated my 75th Birthday* by chronicling my life story in a piece that I truly can describe to you as a "Labor of Love" (Haha... YES, folks... that's *LOVE* for *YOU*, and indeed, *LOVE* for *ME*!!!). I truly hope you've read it AND enjoyed it! And, before I move on, let me say this. *Me living to be 75 years of age is... to me at least... "Clear proof there IS a GOD!" GOD is GOOD, and I'm very thrilled to Still be Kickin'* and reporting this event to you all.

MICHAEL ROJAS is one of the two *Founders and Owners* of the highly successful **Iron Grip Barbell Company**, along with **SCOTT FRASCO**. Iron Grip was founded by Michael and Scott in 1993. Yesterday, I received a wonderful phone call from Michael wishing me a *Happy 75th Birthday* and noted that *both of our companies had been launched in the same year, 1993*. Michael had read our January Cover Story, featuring me on the cover, and he brought up the fact that we both have Louisiana backgrounds. *I was born in Minden, Louisiana on January 17, 1946*. But, I never lived in Louisiana. My Mom, the late **LEOTA CATES** and my Dad, the late **NORM CATES, SR.**, were visiting my Mom's family in Springhill when I decided to join the Planet Earth population! Michael Rojas, age 55, grew up in Louisiana, and he and his partner, Scott, run Iron Grip Barbell Company in California (See the **Iron Grip Ad on Page #9**). So, with this Note, I want to reach out to Michael and say, "**Thanks for your call, Dude!**" I also want to Thank Michael for our really FUN time on the phone! And, I especially want to **THANK both Michael and Scott**, and their Associate, our good friend, **LIZ BIANCHI**, for advertising in *Club Insider* for so

many years!

■ The late **JACK LALANNE** holds a very special place in the history of the health and fitness club industry, a place rivaled by no one, *EVER!* The *history of Jack LaLanne*, and his lovely wife, **ELAINE "LALA" LALANNE**, has been chronicled in an amazing lineup of six books previously released over the years. I'm excited to announce that, next month, LaLa LaLanne will release their *7th book* about *her and Jack's life* entitled: **Pride and Discipline: The Legacy of Jack LaLanne** by *Elaine LaLanne* and co-author *Greg Justice*.

As a bonus, only to be provided to each of you who order Elaine and Greg's special new book through the **Ad on Page #21**, you will receive a writing by Jack entitled: **You Are An Architect**. Since I've read this amazing, "*You Are An Architect*," bonus writing, a writing which has *NEVER* been released, I can tell you now that you're going to want to own and read this amazing new book and receive this bonus, never released writing, suitable for framing, I might add!

So, check out the **Ad for Pride and Discipline: The Legacy of Jack LaLanne on Page #21** and **PRE-ORDER IT TODAY!** *YOU will be GLAD you did!*

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

■ **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.

...The "Insider Speaks"

continued from page 6

Midtown through this existential crisis. But, in alignment with the Midtown legacy, Steve went even further. A former *IHRSA Board Member* and influential industry leader, he stepped up **BIG TIME** to bring together the Chicago and Illinois health club industry to protect health clubs. He didn't stop at the borders of Illinois, Steve has been one of the leaders in *IHRSA* to influence public policy, develop strategies and find ways to bring health club owners together to speak as one voice and act in harmony to preserve our industry. Thank you, Steve!

Finally, there was one person who played a key role in the life of this wonderful family: **Ronnie Schwartz**. Ronnie is the daughter-in-law of Kevie, the wife of Alan, the mother of Steve, the grandmother of Alex and an unsung heroine in the Schwartz story. She is smart, strong, versatile and a

truly wonderful human being. Wherever Ronnie travels, she leaves a trail of loving thoughts and experiences. People always feel better about themselves when they interact with this kind, sensitive and elegant woman. She has been there for her whole family every step of the way. When I see Steve in action, I see a merger of two talented and giving spirits that I'm sure helped make Alex the fine young man he is today.

My final word and the only slight disagreement with the interview was when Steve referred to **Laury Hammel** as a "tennis fanatic." I feel that understates things dramatically. A more appropriate might be *tennis addict, extremist, radical and zealot*.

With Gratitude,

Laury Hammel

Founder and Owner of the Longfellow Health Clubs in MA, NH and UT

■ **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* honored 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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...Stephen Tharrett

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willing to take the time to learn. A teacher at heart... something he also did at the high school level years ago.

The remainder of this tribute will consist of comments from many industry colleagues and personal friends. But, first, you will hear from his wife, **Denise**, followed by friend and business partner, **Mark Williamson**. Please read on.

An Interview With Denise Tharrett, Beloved Wife of Stephen Tharrett

Club Insider (C.I.) - When, where and how did you meet Stephen? When did you both get married?

Denise Tharrett (DT) - We met in college. Stephen was a junior, and I was a sophomore. I often teased him that he was the only good thing I ever got out of the Education class that we took together. We married in June of 1976, eight days after I graduated from college.

C.I. - Please tell us about your children **Alyssa** and **Travis**.

DT - Stephen loved being a father. During Travis' childhood, they enjoyed participating in Scouts and karate together. Recently, Steve was a business partner with Travis in a video gaming company called *Dinosaurs Games*. Even though Steve rarely played video games, he liked the challenge and working with a younger generation. With Alyssa, he liked playing sports, including tennis and basketball, and he attended every track meet where she threw the shotput and discus. He was especially proud of Alyssa when she graduated from his alma mater, the *University of Michigan*, with a degree in architecture. Her career has been influenced by her father and focuses on designing fitness and recreation facilities.

C.I. - Please tell us about Stephen's background in sports.

DT - As a boy in the 1960s, Stephen's favorite sports were any pickup game he could play with kids in his neighborhood. In high school and college, he played golf and football, wrestled and threw the shotput and discus in track. His passions were golf, weightlifting and body building. He formed weightlifting clubs at college, and later, at the high school where he was a teacher.

C.I. - What was your favorite thing about Stephen?

DT - He was definitely an optimist. He strove to find good in people. There was a passion for living and contagious energy about him. He loved his family openly and unconditionally.

C.I. - What was Stephen's favorite thing to do?

DT - Spending time with his family and friends was the most important activity for



Stephen and Denise Tharrett, 1976



The Tharrett Family, 1988

Steve. He relished in talking and spending time with the people he loved and could never get enough of them.

C.I. - Please share something others might not know about Stephen.

DT - When Stephen was a teenager, he caddied at a local country club. Some pro golfers were playing on the course, and he really wanted to get their autographs. He was told that it was not possible, so Steve climbed up on the club house roof and hung down over the doorway just as **Arnold Palmer** was entering. Palmer admired Steve's ingenuity so much that he gave Steve his autograph. Outside of the fitness industry, Steve had a profound interest in Eastern philosophy and traditions. He had several black belts in karate and spent over 20 years practicing the Art of Bonsai.

C.I. - Stephen was truly a health and fitness club industry advocate, leader, legend, mind, veteran and friend. What did the industry and the people within it mean to him?

DT - Most of his adult life has been spent reading, writing, presenting, teaching and working in the fitness industry. Most of his friendships have been from the fitness industry. He has traveled all over the world learning about and promoting the industry he had such a passion about. He genuinely believed that *Exercise is Medicine* and increases the quality of all aspects of our lives.

C.I. - Please share any closing comments you'd like to make about the great man, Stephen Tharrett.

DT - Steve was a leader and mentor to many people, including his family. His passion and selflessness were evident in everything he did and every relationship he made. He wore his heart on his sleeve and always believed in self-improvement and the good in others.

An Interview With Mark Williamson, Co-Founder and Principal of ClubIntel with Stephen Tharrett

Club Insider (C.I.) - When and how did you

industry leaders who resoundingly said that what we were looking to offer the industry was missing. This feedback gave us the incentive to build ClubIntel. With that said, after more than 50 combined years working with private clubs, spas, resorts and fitness clubs of all sizes across the globe, we came to know one simple truth: *the most successful, most profitable brands are those that understand their customer and can turn that understanding into a personal connection*. Our mission with ClubIntel was to help operators make that connection.

C.I. - What is your best memory of Steve?

MW - Steve and I truly were the 'Odd Couple' of business. Privately, we kiddingly jabbed each other and laughed at our differences. We had a lot of fun, worked hard and really enjoyed each other.

C.I. - What made him so unique?

MW - It's rare to find someone who so freely builds relationships and maintains those relationships for the duration of a career. Steve called his business colleagues 'friends,' and they truly were his friends who he could call on at any time.

C.I. - What were his contributions to the health and fitness club industry?

MW - Many have said Steve was the industry's historian; he literally wrote the book on the history of the fitness industry and loved to impart his knowledge. He read incessantly and stored facts which were freely shared to everyone he encountered.

C.I. - Stephen was truly an industry advocate, leader, legend, mind, veteran, etc. What did the health and fitness club industry, and the people within it, mean to him?

MW - It goes without saying, Steve was passionate about the health and fitness industry. Fitness, the industry, was in his DNA; he was an athlete, studied wellness in college and built a career around his passion. His passion became a devotion, and that devotion inspired him to be the leader we all came to know.

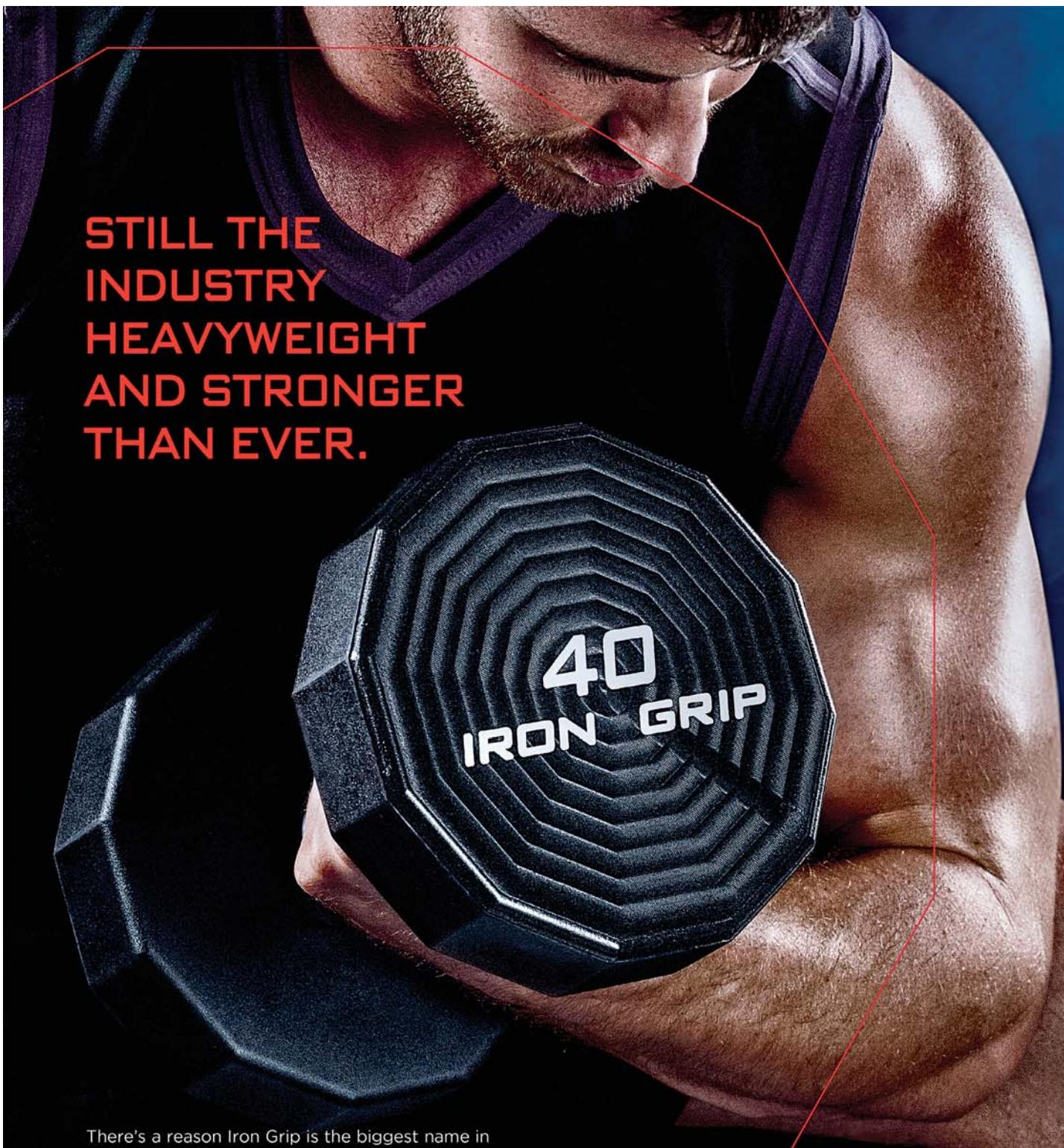
C.I. - Please provide a final message to Steve and/or his family.

MW - Steve and I spent the better part of the past eight years traveling the world together and talking on the phone or texting nearly every day. We had a lot of alone time together where we discussed everything from religion, philosophical values, political dynamics, business strategies, and more personally, our relationships with family and friends. Steve had a soft side to him, and he cared deeply for the people within his circle. On many levels, in addition to being my business partner, he was like a big brother to me. I'll miss our talks but will hold tightly to the many memories we shared throughout the years.

(See **Stephen Tharrett** Page 10)



Mark Williamson



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...Stephen Tharrett

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**Comments From
Industry Colleagues and Friends****Comments From Norm Cates,
Co-Founder and First President of IHRSA
and Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993
of Club Insider**

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 significant 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. *I wish to extend my sincere condolences to Stephen's family, and to his business partner and friend, Mark Williamson.*

**Comments From Rick Caro,
President of Management Vision, Inc.**

I have known Steve for perhaps 30 years or more. I watched as he developed a rising career and became a real leader in the high-end, high-service sector. He had a chance to develop his leadership skills by working directly with ClubCorp's **Founder & Owner, Bob Dedman**. He studied their unique culture and built upon it. His career grew as he led the *Athletic Division*, the tennis and swim component, and later, the *Golf Division*. He was a great student to Mr. Dedman and built upon that foundation:

He was devoted to staff development. He created an online training program with online testing. This was unheard of at that time. He fostered a supportive attitude with regular handwritten notes of praise to employees, especially those at lower levels. He created a team of senior executives to share best practices.

He was always learning. As ClubCorp developed new clubs, even internationally, Steve learned about market analyses, membership concepts,



Childhood Stephen



Martial Arts Stephen

different business practices and staffing challenges. He was building his storehouse of knowledge, so he could deploy it in later years. He was always in the field learning and questioning to further his knowledge.

He participated in the industry as a whole. He got involved with IHRSA. He was elected to the IHRSA Board and then became its President. He often wrote articles and spoke frequently at industry events.

He was precise about his expertise. He helped develop the Standards for the industry, writing a textbook that framed them out. He edited version after version of them over the years. This led to his work in later years as an expert witness for the industry.

He participated as an active member of the club industry's first Executive Roundtable group, the *Faust Roundtable*, for years. The participants to this day refer to his sharing and significant contributions.

He then took on a most difficult assignment as CEO of the major Russian Fitness Group of Clubs. Besides living in freezing conditions with no local friends in Moscow, no support mechanism and a lack of the Russian language, he succeeded. He inherited a company labeled as 'black' because of its failure to conform to legal requirements in business. In short order, he got it re-classified as 'gray' and soon 'white,' fully legitimate and accountable. It then attracted a major Wall Street company as an investor.

When he stepped down as CEO, he returned to the United States. He then

developed a leading market research firm with his partner, Mark Williamson. Club Intel did individual assignments for club companies as well as industry research as a whole. It discussed topical trends and took the lead in providing concrete consumer data during COVID-19.

Steve loved the club industry. He revered its history and wrote books on it. He shared its insights and created a variety of textbooks for all to use. He frequently shared his thoughts in oral presentations. He was a force in the industry. His legacy is grand. He left us all too early, but he touched so many of us along the way. He will not be forgotten. He truly made his mark in the fitness industry.

I miss him already.

**Comments From John McCarthy,
25-year IHRSA Executive Director Emeritus****Club Insider (C.I.) - How did you know Stephen Tharrett and for how long?**

John McCarthy (JM) - I have known Steve Tharrett for over 35 years. I first knew him when he was, in effect, the CEO for all of ClubCorp's fitness and athletic clubs. He was the one who brought all of those clubs into IHRSA. He was also on the IHRSA Board of Directors and was elected by his fellow Board Members to be the President of the Association. In the four years he was on the IHRSA Board, and particularly when he was the IHRSA President, I had the pleasure of working closely with him.

C.I. - What is your best memory of him?

JM - Steve was the consummate gentleman. Always thoughtful, kind, committed to his work, friendly, warm, a man of the utmost integrity, enormously hard-working and productive. In addition to all of his work and responsibilities, he wrote at least ten books. He was an amazing man and always a good friend to me, as well as so many others.

C.I. - What made him so unique?

JM - Tough question, because he had so many strong traits. The one thing that always impressed me the most was his thoughtful and kind humility. He never boasted, never bragged, never tooted his own horn. And, this was just one of the reasons why he was so well liked and admired by so many.

C.I. - What were his contributions to the health and fitness industry?

JM - Another tough question, because his integrity itself was a huge contribution, but when he brought all of ClubCorp's high-value and highly-esteemed clubs into IHRSA, that by itself, broadened IHRSA. It said that every club from the smallest and least well-known to the largest and most prestigious can comfortably join and contribute to IHRSA as he himself did so magnificently.

C.I. - A final message to Steve and/or his family.

JM - To his wife and children I say this: Your husband and father was a uniquely kind, thoughtful and generous man whom all of us were privileged to know, and all of us were elevated simply by knowing him. A true and great man, and as I said above: *the consummate gentleman*. Admired and beloved!

**Comments From Dr. Art Curtis,
President of Curtis Club Advisors, LLC.**

It all seems a bit surreal as I sit here at the keyboard collecting my thoughts about the many years that I have had the good fortune to know Steve as both a colleague and friend.

We first met back in the late 1970s, early 1980s by way of our involvement with the *American College of Sports Medicine*, then eventually with IHRSA. Through the

(See **Stephen Tharrett** Page 12)



Norm Cates



Rick Caro



John McCarthy



Dr. Art Curtis

“ We've not only continued to operate during this pandemic, this system actually saved our company and gave us the ability to grow, instead of closing, like many clubs around us.”

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“We've not only continued to operate during this pandemic, this system actually saved our company and gave us the ability to grow, instead of closing like many clubs around us. In fact, we've made more money than we were making BEFORE the pandemic.”

**- Mary Clark, Owner,
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...Stephen Tharrett

continued from page 10

years, we have often served together on various IHRSA committees and been speakers on various panels that one or the other of us has moderated. In the last few years, on several occasions, we have recommended one another to potential clients when we were either too busy to accept an engagement or may have had a conflict of interest with another client.

One of the characteristics that I have always relished about the fitness industry is the willingness of so many people to unselfishly give back to make the industry stronger and help it to grow. No one has exhibited that trait more than Stephen Tharrett. He has always been ready, willing and able to help the industry whenever it was needed. There's no better example of that than the work that Steve and his partner, Mark Williamson, at Club Intel, have done since the start of the COVID 19 pandemic. As we all wondered how our members and consumers would respond to the pandemic, they jumped in and started to conduct research that would prove invaluable to the industry as we all try to navigate through this most difficult time. Their work has clearly provided insights and inspiration while being impactful to so many.

So many of my fondest memories of Steve are connected with IHRSA-sponsored events. One event that stands out in particular was a dinner in San Francisco that was held in conjunction with the annual Convention and Trade Show that year. It was attended by many of the early Founders and former Board Members of IHRSA. The dinner was hosted at one of ClubCorp's City Clubs that, of course, was arranged through Steve, who had been a CCA Vice President. Steve and I walked over from the Marriott Hotel to the dinner that night. He was struggling with a very painful hip, but he never complained. We both enjoyed the opportunity to catch-up on family and friends during the walk to the event without the distractions of the Convention. It was those quiet moments where we were just friends that I will remember most.

Hopefully, Steve's wife, Denise, and children, Travis and Alyssa, will find some comfort in knowing how much Steve



Teacher Stephen



Russian Stephen

meant to so many people and how much of a difference he made during his time with us. He will be greatly missed but very fondly remembered. Rest In Peace, my friend.

**Comments From Gale Landers,
Founder and CEO of Fitness Formula Clubs**

Stephen Tharrett was a good friend to me and a good friend to the entire fitness industry.

I got to know him in the 1990s when he would come through Chicago while on the staff of ClubCorp, overseeing their dozens of fitness facilities across the country. He often worked out at various FFC locations, and we developed a friendship over meetings and meals. I also had the good fortune of working with him when we overlapped briefly while serving on the IHRSA Board.

His knowledge and history of the United States fitness industry was immense. That knowledge expanded to an encyclopedic level when he combined it with his international fitness consulting amongst various nations of the world. He was a one-of-a-kind in that he created deliverables for virtually all sectors of our industry: commercial clubs, fitness studios, private clubs and recreation centers in order to provide an angle for club owners and operators to use to differentiate and create their value propositions. He had a prolific ability to interpret data and turn it into valuable white papers, reports and books. He could publish information like few I have ever seen.

Steve had a unique analytic capability and an uncanny ability to communicate in clear, understandable and useful information along with his partner Mark Williamson. He worked tirelessly to advocate on behalf of the benefits of exercise, market research, industry trends and future forecasting, and provided credible data for use by organizations looking from the outside into our industry.

His passion for our industry and support of IHRSA's initiatives reached no end. Our industry is thankful for all of his contributions. He will be sorely missed.

**Comments From Brent Darden,
Interim President & CEO of IHRSA**

Steve was truly a gentleman and a scholar. A personal friend and colleague, he was always willing to help in any way that he could and regularly contributed his time and expertise for the benefit of myself, IHRSA and the industry. Steve possessed a brilliant mind, evidenced by his prolific research, presentations and writings. He was a passionate student and teacher of health and fitness, using his analytic prowess to foster understanding, professionalism and credibility. He was a servant leader that will be dearly missed.

**Comments From Bill McBride,
Co-Founder, President & CEO of
Active Wellness, LLC. and
Founder, President & CEO of BMC3, LLC.**

I have known and cared about

Stephen Tharrett for more years than I can remember. Steve was a wonderful man, a great friend and someone who connected others. My strong friendship with **Brent Darden** was a result of Steve bringing us both to Moscow to present for his company, *World Class Clubs*. Steve was a proven leader in many organizations. He delivered results and success, but more importantly, culture. Steve had a brilliant mind and with his partner Mark Williamson, and ClubIntel created a lot of credibility in our industry through data analytics. Steve was always humble. I'm not sure he realized the massive positive impact he had on our industry and all of the individuals he touched and made better. Steve was an industry icon and true friend. Rest In Peace Steve.

**Comments From Chris Clawson,
CEO of Life Fitness**

Club Insider (C.I.) - How did you know Stephen Tharrett and for how long?
Chris Clawson (CC) - I first met Stephen in the mid-90s on the trade show circuit as he'd always come by our booth to chat about the industry while in his ClubCorp role.

C.I. - What is your best memory of Steve?
CC - Seeing him working with the Russian Fitness Group and sharing his vast knowledge of the global industry with them as they rapidly changed the face of the country's fitness landscape.

C.I. - What made him so unique?
CC - Stephen always had a smile on his face. I don't know that I ever had an encounter with him where he wasn't optimistic about the future. He was an advocate for the fitness industry, and his crucial research during the COVID Pandemic proved he could not be dissuaded from his positive outlook on fitness' recovery.

C.I. - What were his contributions to the health and fitness club industry?
CC - For decades, Stephen not only encouraged major industry shifts, but he helped to make them happen.

C.I. - Please provide a final message to Steve and/or his family.

(See **Stephen Tharrett** Page 13)



Gale Landers



Brent Darden



Bill McBride



Chris Clawson

...Stephen Tharrett

continued from page 12

CC - We've seen dozens of people cycle through the fitness industry over the past 50 years but only a few who have maintained a meaningful presence across the decades... Stephen was one of those insiders that constantly evolved and stayed relevant throughout his career. I will miss his kind spirit, and I know that I'm not alone in that realization.

Comments From Steven Schwartz,
CEO of Midtown Athletic Club

Club Insider (C.I.) - How did you know Stephen Tharrett? And, for how long?
Steven Schwartz (SLS) - I got to know Steve when we served together on the IHRSA Board from 1994 - 1997.

C.I. - What is your best memory of Steve?
SLS - When Steve ran for President of IHRSA, he made a speech to the Board. He had carefully prepared it and written it out. Halfway through, he broke into tears and said something to the effect that, 'This was his life's dream... To lead the health club industry, an industry that he had devoted his life to that allowed him to follow his passion to help people.' It was a deeply moving drop the mic moment.

C.I. - What made him so unique?
SLS - He had great integrity and was always constructive, positive and kind.

C.I. - Please provide a final message to Steve and/or his family.
SLS - I was shocked and saddened by Steve's untimely passing. He had a lot more to give. We are better off as an industry for his ongoing efforts and insights, and he will be missed.

Comments From Ed Williams,
President & CEO of Wellbridge

Steve Tharrett was a great guy and a great asset to our industry. I first met Steve when he worked for CCA. We were working for Rosewood Property to help develop an athletic club near SMU in Dallas. I was a yahoo from Denver. Steve took the time to meet with me, show me around a couple of clubs and offer to help

where he could, and he did. We continued our friendship for the years after, and I had the opportunity to meet his daughter when she went to work for OLC Architecture. She is as warm as Steve. The latest showing of his character was a few months ago when we talked about what was happening in the industry, and he again offered to be a sounding board when I needed to talk. Steve Tharrett, a friend to all, he will be sorely missed by me and the industry.

Comments From Greg Lappin,
President of Lumahai, LLC.

Club Insider (C.I.) - What is your best memory of Steve?

Greg Lappin (GL) - My strongest recollection of Steve was that he always possessed such a zest for life. He was always so friendly, always enjoyed himself. My best memory was him telling stories of his time as a consultant to the clubs in Russia. For example, not many clubs in the United States had members come in with two bodyguards carrying submachine guns who would guard their boss during his workout...

C.I. - What made him so unique?

GL - Steve was one of the 'good guys.' He was a sincere, humble man who treated everyone with dignity.

C.I. - What were his contributions to the health and fitness club industry?

GL - Steve had a tremendous work ethic. He was very dedicated to the club industry. He was a real student of the industry and business trends. He wanted facts to back up his reasons for doing things. He was an 'out of the box' thinker.

C.I. - Please provide a final message to Steve and/or his family.

GL - Steve, you were one of the 'good guys,' you will be greatly missed.

Comments From Tim Rhode,
Owner of Rhode Management Company

There are few people who dedicated themselves to the industry at a greater level than Steve. His vast experience and firm grasp about things really worked and offered so many a reliable resource when making important decisions. You couldn't have a conversation

with Steve without learning something valuable. I am fortunate to have had him as a colleague and friend and will always treasure the times we had together.

Comments From Chuck Leve,
Senior Business Consultant for Association of Fitness Studios

The fitness industry lost a true giant with the sudden and untimely passing of Steve Tharrett, my good friend of over 30 years. A brilliant man of impeccable ethics, Steve will always be remembered for his intellectual generosity as first in line to offer help and guidance to any who needed it. Having worked closely with Steve on many projects over the years, I will always cherish our time together. From a day of self-touring storefront temples in the inner neighborhoods of Hong Kong to tirelessly removing redundancies from the first draft of his latest research study, my life was incredibly enriched by his. Kind and sensitive, Steve brought dignity and professionalism to our industry, traits often in short supply. He is already missed.

Comments From Grant Gamble,
Owner of GIG Consulting

I first met Steve when I joined the Faust Roundtable #1 almost 20 years ago. Steve immediately struck me as an incredibly intelligent, articulate and humble human being. He welcomed me to the group openly. Over the ensuing years, I learned a great deal from him and the other Roundtable members. With the late **Dr. Gerry Faust** leading this group and **Rick Caro's** stewardship, meeting Steve in this forum was indeed enhanced. After Steve left the group, I stayed in contact with him and had the opportunity to catch up intermittently and employ his services on several occasions. At all junctures, Steve operated with the upmost integrity, professionalism and humanity. I counted Steve among my friends and feel that the fitness industry and world at large lost a great man with his passing. My heartfelt condolences go out to Steve's family. Such a loss!

Comments From
American Council on Exercise

For the past two decades, the

American Council on Exercise (ACE) was honored to work closely with Stephen Tharrett. As an industry expert who authored the *ACE Fitness and Business Forms Handbook*, developed continuing education courses and contributed as a member of the *ACE Industry Advisory Panel* and to multiple ACE blogs, Stephen generously shared his wealth of knowledge to help *ACE Certified Professionals* and other exercise professionals learn and understand the business side of fitness. His legacy and impact on the fitness industry will continue to live on throughout the numerous resources he has shared and the individuals he has taught. We will miss Stephen dearly, and we extend our deepest sympathies to his wife and family.

■ ■ ■

Thank you to **Denise Tharrett** for sharing their story and her memories of Stephen during this tough time. Thank you also to **Mark Williamson** for his comments about his friend business partner in *ClubIntel*. Additionally, thank you to **Norm Cates**, **Rick Caro**, **John McCarthy**, **Dr. Art Curtis**, **Gale Landers**, **Brent Darden**, **Bill McBride**, **Chris Clawson**, **Steven Schwartz**, **Ed Williams**, **Greg Lappin**, **Tim Rhode**, **Chuck Leve**, **Grant Gamble** and **ACE** for taking the time to comment about their friend and colleague, Stephen Tharrett.

May Stephen Tharrett Rest In Peace.

(*Justin Cates is the Publisher of Club Insider. You can reach Justin by phone at 863-999-2677 or email at Justin@clubinsideronline.com.*)



Grant Gamble



Steven Schwartz



Greg Lappin



Tim Rhode



Chuck Leve

...Where Do We Go?

continued from page 3

to recover. But, here and now, we have a choice. We can rebuild as we were, and again set ourselves up for failure at some point in the future. Or, we can learn from what occurred, most importantly being how the industry was *really viewed*, and take the steps we must to become "essential," preventing the same failure down the road.

So, why did this happen? Many views exist, but I will provide my own: Oversimplifying a bit, it's an education and public relations issue. The light in which we felt we *should be* viewed is not the light in which we *were* viewed. We know the power of our product when yielded properly and effectively. That is our internal perception, our own look in the mirror. Externally, though, we were way off the mark.

The fix for this will not be to yell louder. It will be much more complicated than that and require a unified effort with a new set of standards across the board. At the very least, the industry as a whole must reconstitute itself to become more results driven (for the end user, not the facility). From there, at an industry level, those results must be consistently quantified and verified to prove outcomes. This must include validation from the medical community, as well as validation that our spaces are safe. Only then, through an aggregation of millions of use-cases can we make our own case to Government that we are truly part of the solution and not the problem, thus setting us up to be "essential" in the future.

The idea of being "essential" isn't just to prevent being shutdown during a future pandemic. Many other positive things will come if our industry is seen on the same level as the medical field and respected accordingly. But, as such, it will require a medical level of expertise and support. It is a tall order, but it is not something that should be feared. Instead, it should be embraced because it is how it always *should have* been. Along the way, we were successful enough to be happy as we *were* and not care about what we *could have been*. But, hindsight is 20/20, and it is easy to see that now.

As I said, though, many views exist, and that is the purpose of this article series. Within this first iteration, you will hear from several club operators, as well as several prominent industry consultants who are also *Club Insider Contributing Authors*. They were asked one simple yet infinitely difficult question, the title of this article series: **Where Do We Go From Here?** Across both categories of responses, you will be given views from the trenches near your own, so with that, I invite you to read on.

Club Operator Views

**Comments From Larry Conner, CPA,
President/GM of Stone Creek Club & Spa**

I see our industry as needing to

become a bigger part of the overall health story while continuing to improve our focus on the member experience.

During this time, we have learned the hard way that you cannot be represented fairly if no one understands what you do, how you do it or what effect it has on the overall community. We have to prove that we operate according to industry standards that are put in place to protect the consumers while also improving their health and wellness, which is beneficial to everyone, inside and outside of our clubs.

We also have to be recognized as trustworthy 'professionals' in the health and wellness industry and working closer with the medical industry while also being a larger voice in our communities and in governmental decisions. We put ourselves into this predicament by operating silently, and we must now become vocal and stay in the fight past this current situation, not losing interest and/or steam once this subsides.

While doing this, we have to continue to reinvent by reinvesting in our clubs as we go along. I know, right now, we don't have much if anything to reinvest, but as it starts to come back, start to change or freshen it up. If we can learn anything from other industries, it is that you have to deliver the experience people want, not only for that moment in time, but also continuously. That means constant, well-planned changes.

How aggravating is it when you would go to one of the online movie/television providers and they have the same old movies and shows running when you sign in? They learned that, in their industry, not only do they have to offer easy access in and out of their service, but in order to keep you as a subscriber, they have to change it up. New subscribers do not have a problem with the current offerings, but subscribers who have been there for a while get tired of looking at the same old stuff.

It's the same with our clubs; we not only have to change more continuously, but we also have to keep looking from the member side of the transaction to keep our 'services' hassle free. We must not forget how our clubs look to longtime members and employees so that we can continue



Larry Conner

to excite and motivate them as well as the new members. Otherwise, they will all go somewhere else. We have to focus on an experience that is hard for others to duplicate while also managing all areas of our operations as professionals: following the rules, paying people appropriately and treating everyone with respect. Otherwise, we will continue to be looked at as 'Gym' operators instead of 'Health and Wellness Professionals' who should be 'Essential' to our communities. We are how people perceive us.

Key Statistical Measures

2020 vs. 2019 (in %)

- **Total Revenue:** -20% (w/o PPP/SBA funds)
- **Total Paying Members:** -13%
- **New Member Sales (#s):** -27%
- **Member Cancellations (#s):** +36%
- **Total Check-Ins (#s):** -25%
- **Total Non-Dues Revenue (\$):** -20%
- **EBITDA (\$):** Loss for 2020
- **Total # On Freeze:** +569%

Marco Fiorini,
Interim GM of Cincinnati Sports Club

The Cincinnati Sports Club (CSC) has had a pandemic preparedness plan in place since 2005, and the Club began implementing the plan in January - February in 2020, before COVID-19 was declared a pandemic. When a statewide lockdown was declared, and the club was closed in March 2020, our Net Promoter Score went up 50 points, primarily as a result of our early implementation of the plan. There were a number of lessons learned from 2020 that can be used in the future:

1. We've learned that outside is good:
 - The CSC has had a year-round Outdoor Fitness Pavilion since 2012, seven outdoor racquet courts and two outdoor pools;
 - Expanded the Outdoor Group Exercise offerings to include Spinning and HIIT.
2. We made adjustments to the Master Plan and accelerated the addition of an outdoor 40-yard synthetic turf field.
3. Members liked the use of reservation systems for lap swimming, outdoor pool time and group exercise capacities.
4. We created more contactless transactions for members including:
 - Contact free check-in;
 - No longer accepting cash.

5. We continue to close the club at 10PM during the week instead of midnight until the pandemic ends or as long as club utilization increases.

The CSC has a longstanding history of being considered a second home to our membership. Now, more than ever, this will be more prominent due to our mature market, proximity to downtown

Cincinnati and an anticipated demise of the office market and the rise of working from home. In the first quarter of 2021, we plan to lean heavily on our medical fitness competency, and in the second quarter, transition to our social competency as we believe there will be high pent-up demand for social programs once the virus is under control.

Key Statistical Measures

2020 vs. 2019 (in %)

- **Total Revenue:** -6%
- **Total Paying Members*:** -9%
- **New Member Sales (#s):** -22%
- **Member Cancellations (#s):** 19%
- **Total Check-Ins (#s):** -39%
- **Total Non-Dues Revenue (\$):** -12%
- **EBITDA (\$):** -20%
- **Total # On Freeze:** 22%

*Members on freeze still pay a lower monthly fee.

Note: All financial have been adjusted to not include 2 1/2 months we were forced to close due to Ohio lockdowns.



Anonymous, Multiple Location Club Chain

First, we need to determine what 'rock bottom' is with regards to cancels and the dues line. Members are still cancelling their memberships or going on freeze. Once the dues line stabilizes, we can begin to build it back up by creating 'win back' programs for members who have cancelled or frozen their memberships. This could be a 2- to 3-year process at best. In the meantime, we will take it one day at a time, slowly growing our group exercise class schedule and offering new services and events as our dues line grows. We are investing in online group exercise class streaming and virtual personal training programs as well. We have introduced small social events like wine tastings, cooking classes and hikes to bring back the social element of our clubs. Frequent communication with employees and members has been and will continue to be essential in keeping everyone engaged.

Key Statistical Measures

2020 vs. 2019 (in %)

- **Total Revenue:** -52%
- **Total Paying Members:** -41%
- **New Member Sales (#s):** -38%
- **Member Cancellations (#s):** +105%
- **Total Check-Ins (#s):** -59%
- **Total Non-Dues Revenue (\$):** -56%
- **EBITDA (\$):** -105%
- **Total # On Freeze:** +190%

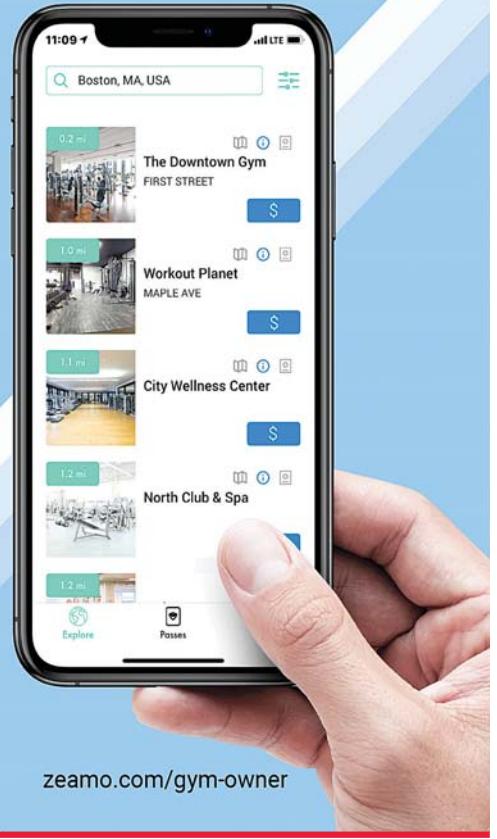
(See *Where Do We Go* Page 15)



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...Where Do We Go?

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Comments From Scott Gillespie, President of Saco Sport & Fitness

First, I believe we'll need to maintain our current flexibility through most of 2021. There are still many unknowns, and timelines are uncertain. The third quarter seems to be a realistic target for the first senses of new normalcy, and beyond that looks better and better. Looking to a time when we see COVID-19 as behind us, I see the chance to go where many new opportunities exist.

An emerging consumer paradigm seeing 'Health' as 'Wealth' opens up many doors. After getting over the 'Quarantine, Isolation and Sanitation = Health' paradigm, move to the acknowledgement that exercising is a critical component to being healthy and that not all exercisers are meant to be fitness models. The face of fitness can dramatically expand to include many more types of people!

In some ways, we can go back to our roots but with a lot more experience, knowledge and tools. For those who were around when we had to teach every new member how to exercise in a club, remember the look of accomplishment

when they 'got it.' I believe as we have served more and more people, and people came in experienced, we started to assume they all were. We've lost some of our obligation to help all those who aren't. Additional thoughts include:

Re or Engaging - Those who can find ways to help people overcome the fear and/or inertia of not exercising for a long time will be the new winners!

Community - With workplaces physically



Scott and Beth Gillespie

diminishing and a pent-up need for socialization, we can become the second place for community and social interaction.

The Virtual Blend - Using it to complement vs. replace memberships.

Club Design:

■ **People like the space they've been enjoying.**

■ **Strength Training** - Running with the strong trend of higher demand for strength and functional training.

■ **Outdoor Fitness** - 'Mikey likes it.' - Now that our members have experienced the feeling of working out outside, they will want more.

Nutrition - Accelerating results with proper nutrition helps people see the benefits of and stick with exercise.

Young Adult Demand - The first generation to be exercising more than their predecessors, a pandemic trend we can take advantage of.

Filling the Void - There will likely be increased demand due to club closures. Will we meet it with more of the same, or more likely, will new models emerge to challenge the status quo?

Finally, where do we go from here? Hopefully, to the pub after the next in-person convention to have a beer with all my industry friends!

Rich Nelsen,
CEO of VASA Fitness

At VASA, we will leverage what we've learned in 2020 to better connect with our employees and members, as we continue to strengthen our fitness (See *Where Do We Go* Page 16)



Rich Nelsen

...Where Do We Go?

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community for better physical and mental health.

Of utmost importance as the pandemic ends and more of our members come back to the gym is continuing to be transparent and communicate often, specifically in regard to our impeccable cleanliness standards, ongoing sanitization efforts and new procedures for keeping members safe at all times.

We will continue to be innovative and will look at introducing relevant fitness solutions to help people remain happy, healthy and feel a sense of belonging within the VASA community.

Anonymous, Single Location Club

The last IHRSA convention was in 2019. While waiting for the other people in my group, I remember I was at the center by the front door, and I could pretty much see all the convention floor by moving my head. In my eyes, what I saw was just like a carnival, young women and men on stage bumping and grinding, loud music, etc. Being at a convention, this picture would not obviously affect our members, but it sends a message to the industry of what we are or what we should or need to look like. No matter what anyone says, we have failed. The percentage of the American population that comes to our clubs on a reasonably steady basis is still about 15%.

I'm not saying that a carnival look does not fit into a studio or space within our facilities; it does. However, we have an additional probably 55% to 65% of the population who don't want anything to do with our industry. We have turned them off:

1. We do not hire people with the proper education/degrees to SAFELY work with these people.

2. We do not create ways to measure our outcomes.

3. We do not create club-level and department-level certifications. I'm not talking about ACE or any company that

certifies trainers. I'm talking about creating a certificate for a health club (or call it a medical wellness center). Such a certificate system would be one that gives us standing in the medical community because we are properly run.

Club Consultant Views

Comments From Casey Conrad,
*President of Communication
 Consultants, WBS, Inc.*

Never in the history of our industry have we had such a prolonged and horrific disruption to business. Yes, that is the blinding flash of the obvious, but it's important to setting the stage for where we go.

Radical situations require radical shifts in thinking. The businesses that have survived the lockdowns and drastic regulations did so for several reasons. First, they probably had a strong base of committed members who continued to support them despite the interruption in services. But, that only takes you so far for so long. Second, some operators were able to think outside the box and quickly move to online delivery of fitness services. Although this served as a great, short-term solution, it also spawned acceleration of other online, interactive fitness platforms that become direct competitors, having technology and equipment to sell (Do you think it is by chance that Peloton just bought Precor?).

It is my humble opinion --and something that I have been screaming from the mountain top for over three years now-- that, to thrive in the fitness industry, an operator must become wellness-focused. People from many walks of life want to be fit, but every person wants to be well, to feel better and live the best quality of life. Furthermore, people are willing to pay a lot more for wellness services than they do for commoditized fitness. Diabetes, joint issues, cardiovascular health, digestive issues, brain health, and yes, immune health are all huge issues that North America (and all westernized countries) face. Integrating wellness with fitness is where the real opportunities exist.

Pull out the book, *Blue Ocean*

Strategy, and their newer book, *Blue Ocean Shift*, to put together a plan of action to find that 4th quadrant of opportunity that is not being fulfilled in today's hyper competitive marketplace. Instead of just trying to compete in your area, be an innovator and you will be more likely to insulate yourself from forces outside of your control.

Comments From Derek Barton,
Owner of Barton Productions

As a marketer, you have to know what your target audience is thinking at any given time. During this pandemic, gym members are wondering if their gym is safe enough for them to return. They will struggle with the choice of risking their health at your facility or continuing to exercise in the safety of their own homes.

You just can't talk about safety, you have to do something about it. You have to dial up the 'health' in health and fitness, as some gym owners have done by installing HEPA air filtration systems like airPHX, which sterilizes particles in the air since COVID is a deadly *airborne* virus. Many gyms have stations with disinfectant wipes and use electrostatic sprayers with hospital-grade disinfectants to sanitize surfaces, and some are looking into state-of-the-art autonomous UVD robots and selling immune-booster supplements. It won't be cheap to initiate some of these changes, but if gyms want to thrive in the future, they first have to become safe havens for their members' health.

With that in mind, it may be the right time to settle on one descriptor regarding your facility. The top three descriptors I've heard when owners describe their place are a 'gym,' a 'fitness center,' and a 'health club.' They all work, but the term 'health club' seems more fitting now. As always, marketing is key. Maybe 'health clubs' should now market a three-tiered membership: (1) in-person training only, (2) online training only, (3) combo of both.

The health club industry has always preached the importance of health and fitness. This pandemic has reminded us that, if you are healthy, fit and have a strong immune system, the odds are in your

favor that you'll be better equipped to fight off illnesses and viruses like COVID-19. So, keep the pedal down!

Comments From Jim Thomas,
President of Fitness Management USA, Inc.

GOT FITNESS? Over 25 years ago, the milk industry raised public consciousness with these two simple words: **GOT MILK?**

This is the direction the fitness industry needs to take immediately. We can't just sit around and take it. We need to create a platform to raise the public awareness of the benefits of fitness.

I remember talking to a member of a gym, and upon discovering where they lived, I asked why she drove so far when there were so many gyms that were near her home... Her simple answer, 'This is where all my friends are.'

I recall a national fitness company (at the time) running TV ads that said, 'If you want to get **HERE** (all the fun activities they want to participate in), then you need to get **HERE** (the gym).'

The fitness industry needs to join together to raise the public awareness on how we can solve problems, provide solutions and bring more fun back to life. We want the public to feel an emotional connection to our industry.

Fitness: It Does A Body Good.
 Of course, I borrowed that from the Milk industry, but you get the idea. This is where we go from here. **GOT FITNESS?**

Comments Karen Woodard-Chavez,
President of Premium Performance Training

The pandemic has been the most significant disruptor we have experienced in a long time, if ever. As disruption always does, it has changed so much for so many. If you are reading this as a business operator, it may be difficult to see the positive in the pandemic because your business has likely been hit hard.

If you have not already done so, please pause with introspection to account for the positive changes that may have occurred in your business over the past year.

(See *Where Do We Go* Page 17)



Casey Conrad



Derek Barton



Jim Thomas



Karen Woodard-Chavez

FITNESS FACILITIES



LIABILITY
PROPERTY
WORKERS
COMPENSATION
SURETY BONDS

THE
PROTECTION
YOU NEED
TAILORED FOR YOUR
FITNESS BUSINESS



SPORTS & FITNESS
INSURANCE CORPORATION

sportsfitness.com

...Where Do We Go?

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This might include realizing how many and who your most supportive members are; the fat you have cut from your business to be a leaner, better organization; how your staff upped their game and the new strengths that came to the surface to make sure the business survives (and can thrive again); the creativity, innovation and grit that has bubbled to the surface providing new solutions to get to the other side of this disruption; the positive operational changes you have made that will remain after this crisis has passed, etc. There are likely many more to list. It is important to recognize these elements, because these are things that got you through and will become part of the new mode of operation.

Will you create an inner circle of Honored Members? Consider how you will reward your most supportive members that stayed with you and had your back. Consider how you will reward and retain that talent of your staff that collaborated to get your business through this crisis. As you prove that you can get through this immense threat to your business, require nothing less in your organization's culture that the energy, creativity, care,

commitment and innovation become part of your everyday operations regardless of crisis.

**Comments From Thomas Plummer,
Founder of National Fitness Business Alliance**

Relentless pressure reveals the flaw, and the beauty, of what lies beneath. The virus left us with two types of owners:

1. The large majority who cling to the past waiting for 2019 to come back to save them. This group has learned nothing, changed nothing and seeks to blame everyone else for what is going on in their lives.
2. The smaller group is seizing the opportunity and is in full attack mode. This group understands the client has changed and what these clients want from the fitness industry has changed forever.

Where do we go from here? We let go of the past, unemotionally understanding where we are today in the fitness industry and embracing what can be in the future. If you go hard, you will win in 2021, but only if you understand what we were, and what we believed in as an industry, is gone.



Thomas Plummer



Sincere thanks to **Larry Conner, Marco Fiorini, Scott Gillespie, Rich Nelsen, Casey Conrad, Derek Barton, Jim Thomas, Karen Woodard-Chavez, Thomas Plummer** and two individuals who elected to remain anonymous for their thoughts and insights.

The question, **Where Do We Go From Here?**, is not an easy one to answer. The answer will develop over time, yet it

will not be the same for all. Across markets, models and management styles, there will be failures, as well as victories. Now, more than ever, this means our industry must work together to learn from each other to implement micro-level solutions but also truly band together to develop a macro-level voice and the data to support it. We must reach a tipping point, where collectively, we cannot be ignored!

If you would like to be included in future iterations of this article, answering the question, **Where Do We Go From Here?**, please send me an email at Justin@clubinsideronline.com.

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

"The Way We See The Problem Is The Problem"

By: Jim Thomas

I'm guessing you've heard this Stephen Covey quote before. Do you agree with it?

What if I told you that there are clubs that are breaking company sales records? What if I told you there are clubs that did better revenue and profits in 2020 than they did in 2019? What if I told you there are clubs that are getting 20+ prospects a day on a consistent basis? What if I told you that there is a new 15,000 square-foot independent club being planned for New York? What if I told you there are clubs in California that have done more sales while conducting workouts outdoors than they did when they were indoors?

I was being interviewed by a major U.S. Newspaper, and I shared this information with them. The response was, "How can that be?"

Now, before I begin, I want to first recognize the devastating effect the pandemic has had on the fitness industry and businesses throughout the U.S. By no means do I want to make light of that. I simply want to bring some success principles that have been followed with amazing results. I hope you find them beneficial. Based on what I have experienced, here you go:

1. Play the hand you're dealt. Yes, you have to wear a mask. Yes, you have to honor social distancing. Yes, there are occupancy limits. Yes, we have more hand

sanitizer than ever. With that said, we have no control over this, so instead, we want to focus on solutions and what we can control, not continually talking about what's wrong.

2. Get our head right and know that people will still buy. It all starts with us. Unless we're positive and are sold on the fact that people will still buy, then it will be a struggle.

3. Create certainty in the community, with our prospects, our members and our staff. This has been done by creating doctor-led advisory boards and a commitment to do more than what the state is requiring to remain safe. Then, promote it.

4. Know that the sales process and business fundamentals are more important than ever. Staff training is right at the top of the list on how to properly handle a telephone inquiry, how to greet a guest, the proper way to use a needs analysis, how to ask for the sale, the proper way to ask for referrals, etc.

5. Understand that now is the time to advance and expand into the marketplace. The single biggest problem most gyms have is no one knows who you are and those who do aren't thinking about you. Get known! There is no shortage of no- and low- cost ways to promote your gym.

6. Be innovative. There are many "free

agent" members in the marketplace. We have had great success promoting to bring in proof of membership at another club for a special discount. We have also had great success marketing to clubs in individual trade areas looking for owners that would like to make an exit. This has created immediate member growth for the acquiring gym and some cash flow for the departing owner (something they may not have had otherwise).

7. Overcommunicate with members. The first goal is to keep who we have, and the initial strategy is to over communicate. Such things as pulling member usage reports each day and creating new and existing member nurturing programs. We want to view ourselves as a resource center to help our members get the results they are seeking.

8. Creating new revenue streams. We want upsell opportunities at point of sale for personal training and retail. We want recurring opportunities for such things as supplements. And, we want to create the membership ladder whereby we can offer add-ons and upgrade opportunities to existing members. All of these will help increase revenue without requiring and additional foot traffic.

Now, let's focus on solutions.

(An Outsourced CEO and expert witness,



Jim Thomas

Jim Thomas is the Founder and President of Fitness Management USA Inc., a management consulting, turnaround and brokerage firm specializing in the gym and sports industry. With more than 25 years of experience owning, operating and managing clubs of all sizes, Thomas lectures and delivers seminars, webinars and workshops across the globe on the practical skills required to successfully overcome obscurity, improve sales, build teamwork and market fitness programs and products. In addition, his company will buy gym equipment from gyms liquidating or closing. Visit his websites at www.fmconsulting.net or www.youtube.com/gymconsultant.

New Year, New IHRSA Initiatives

BOSTON, MA - The New Year is often a time for sweeping changes and large steps forward. 2020 has been a challenging year across the globe, especially for the health and fitness club industry. We have all put in countless hours of work to make our industry stronger, better and more resilient. As 2021 gets into full swing, IHRSA has a lot of new developments to share.

Clubs Across the Globe Make the Active & Safe Commitment

In December, IHRSA launched the *Active & Safe Commitment*, an initiative affirming the industry's commitment to providing a safe and effective space for physical activity. The commitment is based on a checklist of key practices to reduce COVID-19 transmission, adapted from the *Key Considerations for Sports, Fitness, Aquatics & Ancillary Facilities and Clubs in the context of COVID-19* and the *Four Prong Framework for Health Club Reopening*.

As of January 14, 2020, 1,169

health and fitness centers on five continents have joined the *Active & Safe Commitment*.

"This level of support for the *Active & Safe Commitment* clearly demonstrates to the community, to consumers and to policymakers and leaders that the health club industry is committed to providing a low-risk environment for people to be physically active," says **Brent Darden**, IHRSA's *Interim President and CEO*. "This year has underlined just how important physical activity is for physical, mental and emotional health. If you have not joined the *Active & Safe Commitment*, I encourage you to join your peers in telling the world our industry is vital and safe."

Industry Partners to Build a Stronger Industry

Moving forward, IHRSA is excited to recognize our current Supplier Members as *Industry Partners*. Health club operators rely on manufacturers and suppliers for equipment, products and services needed to grow and fuel their business. This name

change recognizes the critical role these companies play within the industry and their partnership with IHRSA towards ensuring the industry's growth and prosperity.

IHRSA Launches the Global Health & Fitness Alliance (GHFA)

In mid-November 2020, IHRSA held the inaugural meeting of a high-level volunteer group of strategic thought leaders, CEOs and other C-suite industry stakeholders uniting to create policies and initiatives for the global fitness market. Over 40 club and industry partner companies from all of IHRSA regions across North America, Latin America, Europe, the Middle East and Asia-Pacific have so far committed to volunteering their expertise and time to this global alliance.

Below is a summation of the goals and objectives agreed on unanimously by the GHFA and what the global fitness community can look forward to in 2021.



Goals:

- Position the health and fitness industry as a key contributor in the preventive healthcare continuum.
- Promote the industry's vital contributions to health, wellbeing and prosperity of societies.
- Facilitate third party credible evidence-based research on the health benefits and economic contributions of the health and fitness industry.
- Promote policies, standards and regulations that support health and fitness business operations.

(See **IHRSA** Page 19)

The Pain of Closing a Club and How to Do It Properly

By: Mike Alpert

As I look back on 2020, many things go through my head, and many emotions come to the surface. At the *Claremont Club* in Claremont, California, we had come off the best year in our 46-year history with strong membership growth; extremely low membership and staff attrition; no aged payables and record net income. Our 2020 budget was a somewhat aggressive one, and yet, through February, we were nicely ahead of our projections. None of us had any idea of what was coming.

In February, news began coming out about a rare, new virus strain that became known as COVID-19. Initially, I thought that this was the strain of flu that we got inoculated for by getting our annual flu shot. Like many, I had no idea that, by mid-March, States and local governments would shut down the country. By March 15th, that is exactly what happened.

Talking with our owners and Board members, we all thought that this was probably a precautionary measure, and that within a couple of weeks, we would be back in business and operational again. After all, the economy was booming; unemployment was at historically low levels and interest rates were at an all-time low in our lifetimes.

When April started and the lockdowns continued, we felt that, for certain, this would not last more than a couple of extra weeks and worst-case scenario, not past April 30th. However, as

we now know, for us, the shutdown lasted well beyond that time. As of my writing this article, we are now well into the 10th month in California. Even with clubs allowed to reopen elsewhere in the country, the severe restrictions make it very challenging for continued financial survival. So, after 47 years of operation and two State shutdowns, the owners of our club made the decision to close operations permanently as of August 1, 2020.

I can say that, without a doubt that it was the most difficult time of my business career. Having to terminate 256 dedicated and outstanding individuals was awful. But, then, having to close the programs for children and adults with cancer; our spinal cord and paralysis and Parkinson's programs and the many other community outreach programs was simply heartbreaking.

The other thing to remember is that it is really devastating to your members and the community in which you operate. In our case, the club truly had become a second home for many people: children grew up at the club, and in some cases, we had second and third generations as members. Lifelong friendships were formed, and many people met their spouse/significant other at the club. Many members wrote to us and said that the closure of the club was like a death in the family.

It is never an easy or enjoyable job to have to close a business, and in our case, a health club, but if there is one thing

you should do, it is to be transparent and regular with your communication to both your members and your staff. Beginning in mid-February of 2020, I began sending weekly emails, with attachments to members and our managers, and at least monthly to all staff. We also held separate monthly Zoom calls with members and staff. I did my best to keep members and staff up to date on everything I knew: the status of the closure and my communication with local county officials; our financial position and challenges; what we were doing to assure proper health standards and safety once we were allowed to reopen the club; decisions made to retain all staff and the reasons for that; the need to adhere to all state and local guidelines, including social distancing, good hygiene and the wearing of masks at all times inside the club. At the end of each Zoom call, and with all emails, I addressed every question and did not shy away from anything.

The number of positive emails that continued to come back (in excess of 2,000 total), even after I announced the club closure was not only amazing but really overwhelming. One thing that both members and staff commented on was how much they appreciated the transparency and consistent communication. I would also suggest that, if you are forced with this same reality, remember that, as a leader, you need to come across with both written and vocal communication in a calming and sincere way.



Mike Alpert

Now, for the good news: *The Claremont Club* has been sold to the McKay family who own, among other businesses, a multi-use club in Carmel, California. So, The Claremont Club will serve the Claremont and surrounding communities once again.

So, be positive, and let's look forward to a much better 2021. Our industry is essential to the health and wellbeing of people. Remember, **Exercise is Medicine**. *To be honest, it is the most powerful medicine we have.*

(Mike Alpert is the COO of Smart Health Clubs and can be reached at mike@smarthealthclubs.com.)

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We invite further volunteers who are at CEO level or C-suite nominated by their CEO representing club chains and major industry partner companies to apply to join the GHFA. For more information, email Kilian Fisher at kfisher@ihrsa.org.

Strengthen Industry Advocacy with National Health and Fitness Alliance

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced club operators to endure an onslaught of misguided actions and callous choices made by policymakers and public officials. Despite providing services that are widely understood to decrease the potential for harm from COVID-19, health clubs have suffered the indignity and distress of being labeled "non-essential," often categorized with casinos and bars, and ignored when requesting emergency economic relief. In response, IHRSA and industry leaders have resolved to create a sharper, broader and more powerful new force for industry advocacy.

The National Health and Fitness Alliance (NHFA) will unite the advocacy,

public policy, stakeholder engagement, fundraising and lobbying efforts of the fitness industry in the United States. As a distinct operating division of IHRSA, the activities of NHFA will be funded in part by revenue generated from IHRSA membership dues and other association activities and also by donations from allied organizations, industry stakeholders and individuals. We are very excited about this new chapter for the club industry and look forward to providing more details soon about how you can join the effort.

A Rallying Cry for the Industry

As part of our relentless efforts to reimagine, reinvigorate and rebuild the health club industry, IHRSA has created a headlight team of marketing experts and owners to create an industry rallying cry in the spirit of the legendary "Got Milk?" campaign. The headlight team will work with *Clearview Insights* to analyze sophisticated data and analytics and develop a broadly appealing message that reflects all segments of the industry. We plan to launch the campaign within the next few months, as clubs reopen from this current round of COVID-19-related shutdowns.

Please keep an eye out for updates. We are confident that you will share our enthusiasm for this historic industry-wide campaign.

Medical, Allied Health and Public Health Professionals Sign Letter In Support of Clubs

Research and data consistently demonstrate that health clubs are lower risk and are not driving COVID-19 transmission. IHRSA has amplified medical voices speaking up on the importance of exercise and the vital and safe role health and fitness clubs play with proper risk mitigation steps.

As of January 12, 43 experts in the fields of medicine, allied health, and public health have signed on to the *Medical Endorsement of Exercise & Lifestyle Medicine letter*. The letter underscores three key points:

1. The U.S. was in the midst of an existing chronic disease epidemic before COVID-19.
2. COVID-19 restrictions have severely impacted mental health, especially among

healthcare workers.

3. Health and fitness clubs are prepared to operate safely, and evidence suggests they are relatively safe compared to other venues.

View the Letter: bit.ly/clubinsider121

Get Signatures: bit.ly/clubinsider122

Two New Advisory Councils Will Lead the Industry Forward

Industry Partner Advisory Council

IHRSA is excited to introduce the *Industry Partner Advisory Council*. This newly formed council will advise IHRSA's Executive Staff and Board of Directors and support the Association's mission "to grow, protect, and promote the health and fitness industry, and help ensure the success of its members." The Council is made up of nine dedicated individuals who have demonstrated success and a commitment to the health and fitness industry through their businesses and personally have a passion to serve.

(See *IHRSA* Page 20)

An Opinion Piece: *Data Suspicion*

By: Jeramy Fishel

2020 was a brutal year, especially for restaurants, entertainment venues and fitness clubs. Twelve months ago, the economic future looked bright. But now, thanks to what can only be seen as an overreaction by various governmental agencies to the COVID crisis, many in these industries find themselves teetering on the brink of extinction. How quickly things can change.

Throughout the past year, we've been told by pundits and politicians to "follow the science" so we might have a chance of defeating the virus and getting back to normal. Science is normally a fairly solid indication of how humanity is succeeding or failing in the endeavors to improve our lives. Now, it's a moving target, whether it dodges left or right depending more on which political party the speaker belongs to or supports than actual data, much of that data having been manipulated for effect.

We, as a society dependent on economic, mental and physical health, can no longer afford to entertain such manipulations.

My business as a data-driven marketing agency depends on accurate data. I cannot rely on the words of the untrained, but politically motivated, to chart my economic course and the courses of those I serve. None of us in the business world can. With that in mind, I present the following data as harvested from various agencies on Sunday, December 27, 2020:

The Center for Disease Control, so often referenced in disseminating COVID information, reports in its *CDC COVID Data Tracker* that there are 18,730,806 COVID-positive cases in the United States, and 325,592 deaths as of the above date. This calculates to a COVID death rate of 0.017%, or seventeen one-thousands of one percent of those testing positive, meaning 99% of those infected survive, many of them without medical care.

Prior to the New Year, a certain politician announced that one out of every one hundred of us has died of COVID-19, displaying either his political need to spread panic, or abysmal math skills. Since the U.S. population is 331,002,651, only one out of 1,017 of us has died of the disease, and most of them were aged, suffered comorbidities, and in all probability, died of other causes. Given the many instances of states and medical facilities fudging figures for either political clout or monetary gain, that suspicion seems more than well founded.

The National Center for Health Statistics reported 2,839,205 deaths from all causes in 2018. The top killers that year were:

1. Heart disease: 655,381;
2. Cancer: 599,274;
3. Chronic lower respiratory disease: 159,486;
4. Stroke: 147,810;
5. Alzheimer's disease: 122,019;
6. Diabetes: 84,946;
7. Influenza and pneumonia: 59,120;
8. Nephritis, nephrotic syndrome, and nephrosis: 51,386;
9. Intentional self-harm (suicide): 48,344.

The previous year, 2017, produced a total death figure of 2,813,503 while 2016 stats showed 2,744,248 Americans dying from various causes. Some of the minor increase indicated can be assigned to a growing and aging population; more people equals more problems. Using 2018 statistics as a base, since 2019 and 2020 stats were not available, COVID would represent 11.25% of total death figures for that year if the COVID death stats can be relied upon. Much of the evidence shows they can't be.

Is COVID therefore a legitimate health issue? Of course it is, as are heart disease and cancer. But, now, let's look at what the World Health Organization (WHO) cites as percentage rates for leading causes of death worldwide:

1. Coronary heart disease: 16.59%;
2. Stroke: 10.16%;
3. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease: 5.35%;
4. Lower respiratory tract infection: 5.20%

*COVID-19 as a subset: 1.43%

Comparing the worldwide COVID death rate of 1.43%, as reported by the WHO, with a U.S. rate of 11.25%, as calculated from CDC figures, one has to

question such a stark deviation between two large population sets. Are we to assume that the rest of the world is better at handling this outbreak than we are with our task force, our distancing, our masks and our unsupportable-by-the-data lockdowns?

Should the logical assumption be that something else is at work? Incompetence? Maybe. Even the vaunted **Dr. Anthony Fauci**, *Head of the COVID Task Force*, hasn't been able to make up his mind about what to do. He was responsible for the February statement that there was nothing to worry about, that special procedures such as shutdowns and masks wouldn't be necessary. He, a medical and epidemiological expert, said we'd reach "herd immunity" if 70% of us were to be vaccinated. Fauci has now elevated that figure to 90%.

Or, is something else behind the economic destruction we're seeing, like putrid politics, which seemed clearer and clearer in the run up to and following the election. During the late campaign, Joe Biden accused Donald Trump of exacerbating the COVID issue by not acting fast enough to block travelers from Wuhan, months after calling him a "jingoist" for having done exactly that. Biden said he'd be the better COVID manager and that he'd establish a new COVID Task Force, somehow insinuating his action would be a new idea rather than parroting of the current policy of just such a task force, established by Trump early-on. But, now, the "new" Task Force is to be headed by none other than Dr. Anthony Fauci, the same man Trump assigned to that position. So, the question just has to be asked: What changes can we expect?

Whatever direction the twists and turns of political jousting take us, none of



Jeramy Fishel

the above can be considered justification for economic suicide. A low COVID death rate, arguably lower than what we're told given the fudging of the figures; a confused and almost assuredly tainted leadership at all levels; and a growing mass of medical professionals not just questioning the efficacy of our reactions to the disease but *objecting to them*, add up to only one conclusion: *It's time to open this country back up. Not next year. Not next month. NOW!*

At the very bottom of all bottom lines is the fact that even our healthcare system cannot survive the economic meltdown we're creating through public conformity to unfounded and politically tainted programs of destruction. This country and this world have had enough.

(*Jeramy Fishel is the Co-Founder of Instinctive Insights, a data-driven marketing insights firm. He can be reached at jfishel@instinctiveinsights.com.*)

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Meet the Council:

Daron Allen, CEO, VFPnext; **Rickard Blomberg**, President, Eleiko Sport Inc; **Bill Davis**, President and CEO, ABC Fitness Solutions; **Laurie McCartney**, President, Global Fitness & Wellness, Ascend Learning, National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM), Athletics & Fitness Association of America (AFAA) and ClubConnect; **Petra Robinson**, President, and Zumba Fitness Industry Liaison/and Trade Shows/Events, *petra robinson inc* and representing Zumba; **Al Rousseau**, Sr. Director – Strategic Accounts, Precor; **Alastair Watson**, Vice President, Keiser Corporation; **Dan Wille**, Global VP of Marketing, Product & Strategy, Life Fitness; **Emmett Williams**, CEO (Asia-Pacific) &

Founding Partner, Myzone.

The IHRSA Medical, Science and Health Advisory Council

The IHRSA Medical, Science and Health Advisory Council will advise IHRSA's Executive Staff and Board of Directors on current research and science to advance the health and fitness industry and protect public safety while improving population health and individual health risks.

Council members include experts in medicine, public health, exercise science, exercise physiology, medical fitness, fitness, nutrition and behavior change. The first six members will join the council this month, for a two-year term, and bring a diverse range of experience in a number of specialties including public health, physical therapy and recovery, lifestyle medicine, emergency medicine, mental health

and research.

Meet the Council:

Tyler Cooper, M.D., President and CEO, Cooper Aerobics and Preventive Medicine Physician, Cooper Clinic; **Maria Borodina, M.D.**, Head, Emergency Medicine Educational Department of Academy of Postgraduate Education; **Lori Deemer, M.D.**, Family Physician, Medical Director of Hancock Wellness Centers; **Jason Beck, M.D.**, Founding and Managing Partner, Arkansas Specialty Radiology; **Mark Panigutti, M.D.**, Board Certified Orthopedic Surgeon, Southwest General Medical Center; **Lee Johnson, M.D.**, Emergency Medicine Physician and Medical Director of the ED, Sparks Regional Medical Center, Arkansas State Representative for District 75.

Crunch Fitness Ranked a Top Franchise in Entrepreneur's Annual Franchise 500

NEW YORK, N.Y. - Crunch Fitness recently ranked in *Entrepreneur Magazine's Franchise 500*, the world's first, best and most comprehensive franchise ranking. Placement in the Franchise 500 is a highly sought-after honor in the franchise industry, making it one of the company's most competitive rankings ever. Recognized as an invaluable resource for potential franchisees, the Franchise 500 ranks Crunch Fitness as #52 for its outstanding performance in areas including unit growth, financial strength and stability and brand power.

"2020 was a challenging year for everyone, but it was also a year of unusual opportunity," says **Jason Feifer**, *Entrepreneur Editor-in-Chief*. "Franchises were able to be nimble and innovative, serving the needs of franchisees and customers in ways that will resonate for many years to come. We believe that, when we eventually look back on this time, we'll see it as a moment when many brands defined themselves for the future."

In *Entrepreneur's* continuing effort to best understand and evaluate the ever-changing franchise marketplace, the company's 42-year-old ranking formula continues to evolve as well. The key factors that go into the evaluation include costs and fees, size and growth, support, brand strength and financial strength and stability. Each franchise is given a cumulative score

based on an analysis of more than 150 data points, and the 500 franchises with the highest cumulative scores become the Franchise 500 in ranking order.

"For us to improve our ranking so dramatically during the last year is a testament to the strength of our franchisees,

our team, our members, and ultimately, the Crunch brand. We are very thankful to everyone that has worked so hard at keeping Crunch thriving even during these challenging times, and we are very excited for the future," says **Ben Midgley**, CEO of *Crunch Franchising*.

Over its 42 years in existence, the Franchise 500 has become both a dominant competitive measure for franchisors and a primary research tool for potential franchisees. Crunch's position on the ranking is a testament to its strength as a franchise opportunity.

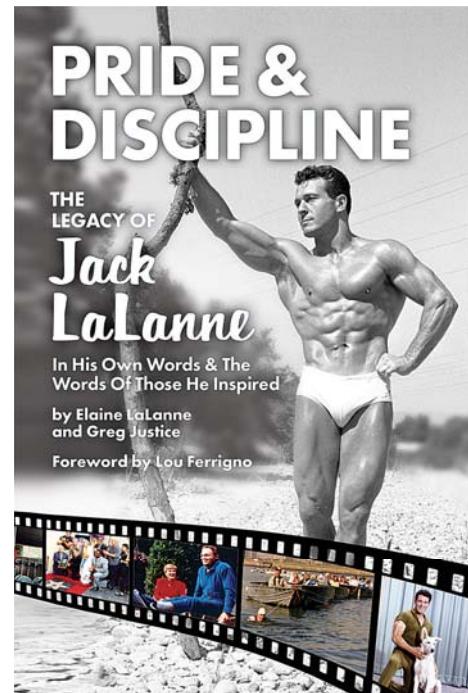
Pride and Discipline: The Legacy of Jack LaLanne

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

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

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

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



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Make It Fun!

A Fork In the Road: Getting the Fit Fitter or Getting the 80% Moving?

By: **Cathy Spencer Browning**

Look straight ahead, squint your eyes. Can you see it? Right there. It is coming up right there in front of us. Can you see it now? It is a fork in the road. Stop. We have to make a decision. We have two choices. Veer left, and that is the road where we get the "Fit Fitter." The traffic is really light, not many cars on that road. The road is paved with an abundance of shame-based motivation promising ripped abs, better glutes, arms to die for and quick weight loss. And, the way to achieve this? No pain, no gain! The road to the right has many people who have been living two pandemics simultaneously, COVID-19 and the pandemic of physical inactivity. The world has been increasingly becoming

more inactive prior to COVID-19, and since COVID-19, many more have stopped moving. This road has heavy traffic... 80% or more of the population. This is definitely a more challenging and longer road to travel. But, the destination is so much more rewarding... Because on this road, we can really change lives. And, because on this road, so many more people need our direction and support.

The road to the left is where we promise weight loss goals and body shape goals, and we assume that people are willing to do anything for that goal. Work out five times a week, sure. Keto, why not? It's the road of HIIT workouts, heart rate monitors, fitness trackers and score-based workouts. It's highly competitive. (See **Cathy Spencer Browning** Page 22)

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...Cathy Spencer Browning

continued from page 21

But, on this road, the 80% cannot get where they want to go. It's too much, it's too hard, and it takes too long to achieve. This leads to extremely high attrition rates. And, this road is actually littered with fitness fanatics, which many are probably better described as the "fickle fit." They are known for their lack of loyalty because they are conditioned to drive and chase after fitness fads. They go from being your member to joining *CrossFit* to joining *SoulCycle*, then possibly coming back to you, or joining the next shiny new health club or extreme Boot Camp of Such-and-Such.

But, we cannot drive the road to the right the same way we drive the road to the left. This is the road we must drive with empathy. It is where we talk to our members about different goals than weight loss, muscle gain or body shape changes. The goal we must discuss is movement. We ask them how we can help them get moving and how we can help them to create some movement habits. We lean in, and we are sensitive to their realities. We understand that most people cannot

start out exercising five times a week; not everyone is coordinated or movement skilled; most aren't motivated by feeling the burn and no pain, no gain; and not everyone will fall in love with exercise. But, maybe, just maybe we can help them to fall "in like" with moving their bodies and eventually build the desire to exercise regularly.

On this road, we talk about results differently. Rather than results that use words like inches, pounds and six-pack abs, we talk about results that use words like better sleep, improved mood, less stress and anxiety, enhanced Movement Health, elevated self-esteem and better brain health. These results happen much more quickly, some after just one workout. Rather than words like train, pain and gain, we use words like move and improve. On this road, we honk horns for successes, like simply just turning up.

To the right, we care about the journey, and we must smooth the road as much as possible. We really help people navigate toward their self-chosen destinations. The road to the left has many speedbumps and potholes that make the journey rough, like workouts that are too intense, too boring, too mindless, too

unenjoyable, like shoving people on the dreaded treadmill, aka the "Dreadmill" or starting them with a HIIT workout. There is little to no chance that they will arrive at their destination. They will veer off course, do a U-turn and head back to where they started... inactivity.

When we choose the road on the right, the programming we offer matters, the staff matters, the way we talk to people matters, advertising and marketing matters, how we make people feel matters. It all really matters.

We can even choose to ride on a bus rather than leaving people on their own to drive. By putting people together in groups, we can create a social fabric, a road that is about community, being social and being connected... We call it the "sticky web..." something that, when we get to the other side of COVID-19, people are going to need more than ever. People are socially starved and physically famished.

Many of us have had no choice but to put on the brakes because of COVID-19. Maybe being at the fork in the road is the perfect time to really consider a new road. Go left and continue to get the fit fitter or go right and get more than 80% of



Cathy Spencer Browning

the population moving.

To learn more about **MOSSA**, our mission to get more people moving and our *M4 Programming: Movement, Music, Motivation and Metrics*, visit www.mossa.net.

(Cathy Spencer Browning is the VP of Training & Programming for MOSSA. Cathy can be reached by phone at 770-989-4700 or email at cathy@mossa.net.)

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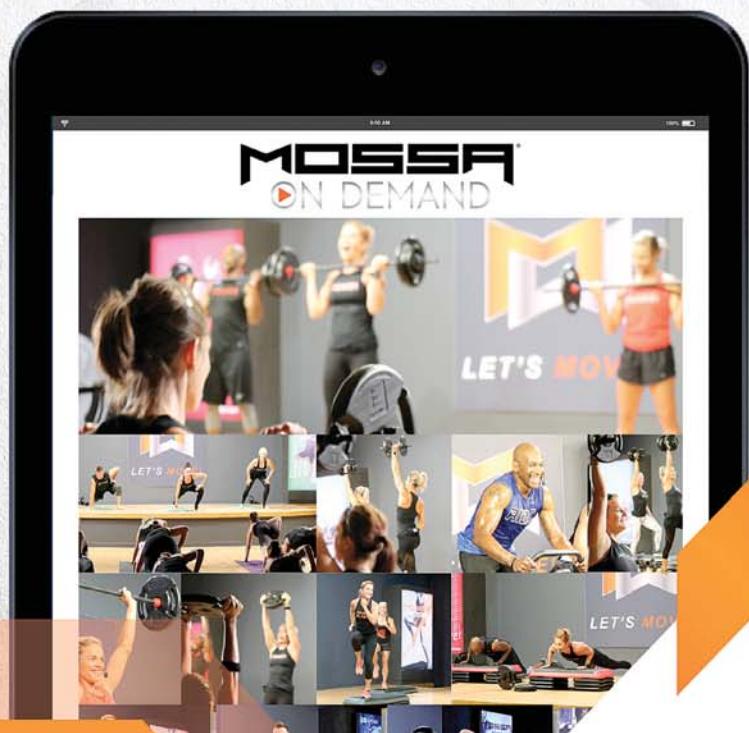
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FROM FOOD TO FITNESS

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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