

Norm Cates'

CLUB INSIDER

CELEBRATING 28 YEARS OF TRUST

The St. James "Welcome to Your Best"



Kendrick Ashton and Craig Dixon, Co-Founders and Co-CEOs of The St. James

JUNE 2021

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CLUB INSIDER

CELEBRATING 28 YEARS OF TRUST

The St. James "Welcome to Your Best"

By: **Justin Cates**

Growing up, in addition to school, I was a three-sport athlete. Depending on the time of year, I would sometimes go to three practices in one day. Or, a practice and a game. Or, some combination, thereof. This was before I could drive, so it was up to my parents to get me from one thing to another, and each location was certainly not next door to each other! Looking back, with both my parents being entrepreneurs, each with his/her own business, I do not know how

they did it! I sure am glad they did though, because those experiences affected the direction of my life in a highly positive way.

I am not a parent yet, so I have not had the opportunity to experience what magic it takes to balance time, and likely sanity, in such a way. However, this month's cover story subjects certainly have, and they are doing something about it. Their names are **Craig Dixon** and **Kendrick Ashton**, and their facility, *The St. James*, is a dream come true for anyone who has experienced what I have written about in this introduction.

THE ST·JAMES

At 450,000 square feet, The St. James is as large as they come, and the facility includes just about anything you could imagine for athletes, exercise enthusiasts or just someone looking to take some time for themselves. Of course, the pandemic has affected the trajectory of The St. James' first flagship location. But, it has also allowed them to hone their craft and

incorporate those learnings into ongoing operations and development of future facilities.

So, I welcome you to read on as **Craig Dixon** and **Kendrick Ashton**, Co-Founders and Co-CEOs of *The St. James*, take you through their journey and what the future holds.

(See *The St. James* Page 12)

An Important Update on Augie's Quest to Cure ALS

By: **Justin Cates**

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, it might have been easy to overlook *Augie's Quest to Cure ALS*. No one could blame anyone else for this. It has been a tough time, and we have all had to do what we need to do to survive and strive for normalcy.

Now that a return to normalcy is on the horizon and truly visible for the first time in months, it's important to reset and take stock of not only what was lost but what still remains. Something truly important for our industry that remains is *Augie's Quest to Cure ALS*, and they need your continued support.

The interview that follows was conducted in May during *ALS Awareness Month* between *Club Insider* and **Shannon Shryne**, President and Co-Founder, and

Gretchen Simoneaux, Vice President, *Augie's Quest to Cure ALS*. Within, as we all had to, they will explain the moves they made to keep important funding flowing. They will preview what is now on the horizon with a return to more normal operations. Finally, they will let you know what you can do to help, if and when you can.

As *Publisher of Club Insider*, I just want to take a moment to thank you in advance for giving this interview a read, because this organization is important, not only to those whom it directly affects through the charity of its contributors and volunteers, but to our industry as a whole in terms of what it will mean to the world that we stood up and did what needed to be done to cure such a horrible, merciless disease.

(See *Augie's Quest* Page 10)



Augie and Lynne Nieto

Inside the Insider: Edition #330

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■ Point - Counterpoint: Exercise IS Medicine - **By:** Mike Alpert

■ Legal Considerations for Mandating COVID-19 Vaccines in the Workplace - **By:** Paul R. Bedard, Esquire

■ Engagement: Building Your Club's Real Social Network - **By:** Jeffrey Pinkerton

■ Over 100 Members of Congress Now Support the GYMS Act

■ IHRSA Restructures Membership Options

■ Keeping Courts Busy For Fun and Fitness

■ And, of Course, *Norm's Notes*

Norm's Notes

■ **Hello Everybody!** This is your **Club Insider Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993** checking in with our **330th** monthly edition of *Club Insider*! Enjoying a *Spring Day made in Heaven* here in the ATL, I can't help but tell you all that Justin and I really appreciate the fact that *you're reading these words right here right now*. We appreciate that fact because this "*Labor of Love*" we call *Club Insider* is cruising into this Summer of 2021 with very positive thoughts for you and about you! And, we're very honored and pleased to be able to say to you that, with your help, we've now published this 330th monthly edition while dealing with this dratted pandemic, and we feel blessed to **have NEVER missed a beat!** **YAHOO!**

■ **Is America a great country, or what?!** I hope this finds **You, Your Family and Your Team** avoiding the **Coronavirus** like the plague it is! **GOD Bless America!**

■ **Memorial Day was Monday, May 31st, and I want to pay tribute to, and in honor of those who've served our country and**

while doing so, have lost their lives. May they all Rest In Peace, and may their families accept our sincere Thanks and Appreciation for the sacrifice of the loss of their loved ones who lost their lives while fighting to preserve America's Freedom. God Bless you all and may God Bless America!

■ **Folks...** to get this month's **Norm's Notes** rolling today I first want to **Tip My Black Hat** to **acknowledge and honor CRAIG DIXON and KENDRICK ASHTON, Co-Founders and Co-CEOs of The St. James**. Having written *cover stories* in *November 2002* and *June 2010* about the also truly amazing **350,000 square-foot East Bank Club** in Chicago, I must say that you should not miss reading this month's amazing cover story about **The St. James** in Springfield, Virginia, a **450,000 square-foot** creation that is truly hard to believe. And, while I'm *Tip My Black Hat* to these great entrepreneurs, I also want to Tip it to my son, **JUSTIN CATES**, our esteemed, dedicated and hard-working *Publisher of Club Insider*! **Justin did a GREAT JOB on**

this cover story, so don't miss reading it! **Kudos... Dude!**

■ **On May 6, 2021, I had hip surgery successfully performed by DR. MARK HANNA, and his World Class RESURGENS ORTHOPEDIC Team at St. Joseph's Hospital in North Atlanta. Dr. Hanna and his Team may be the best in their field anywhere in United States of America, OR for that matter, anywhere in the ENTIRE World!** I write these glowingly positive comments so that any one of you who are in need of hip or knee surgery will know about Dr. Hanna and his Resurgens Team. Contributing to my very high level of enthusiasm during several previous years prior to my surgery were rave reviews from six or seven of my local Atlanta area friends who're also patients of Dr. Hanna. I want to Thank Dr. Hanna and his great Team for the excellent job they did on my right hip replacement surgery. Dr. Hanna's excellent team consists of: **NATHAN TERRELL, (PA-C) - Physician Assistant to Dr. Hanna; DARRYL MINOR, SA - Surgical Assistant; PATRICK HARKINS, MD - Anesthesiologist; CHRISTY SLATTERY, RN; AMY YANG, MA; NISHI MOWLA, MA and VANESSA RODRIGUEZ-BADILLO, MA.**

Friends and neighbors, I must confess that at my ripe old age of **75**, I was a bit apprehensive before having this surgery. The truth be told... the positive feedback I had received about Dr. Hanna and his great Resurgens Team **really helped me make the decision to press on!** Also, weighing in on my decision was a conversation I had with Dr. Hanna before I made my decision to have him do this



Norm Cates

surgery. I asked him how many surgeries he performs every year, and he told me that, on average, he does **400 knee surgeries and 200 hip surgeries per year, which is 600 total surgeries per year or 12 per week!** **AMAZING!** So, as I sit here writing this on **May 20, 2021**, I'm enjoying the fruits of their labor. I've been walking without a cane or a walker since three days after the surgery, and I'm greatly looking forward to getting back to my **daily 3.2-mile walks** down by the river. Starting back in May of 2000, six days a week for 18 years, I went down to the *Chattahoochee River*, a beautiful and relaxing place, and I walked at least 3.2 miles a day accumulating over 18,000 miles during the years **2000 to 2018!** It was three years ago I began to have the hip problem, knocking me out of my 18-year, daily routine. So, I'm really looking forward to taking those walks again as soon as I

(See *Norm's Notes* Page 7)

About Club Insider

CELEBRATING 28 YEARS OF TRUST

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Thanks and Appreciation

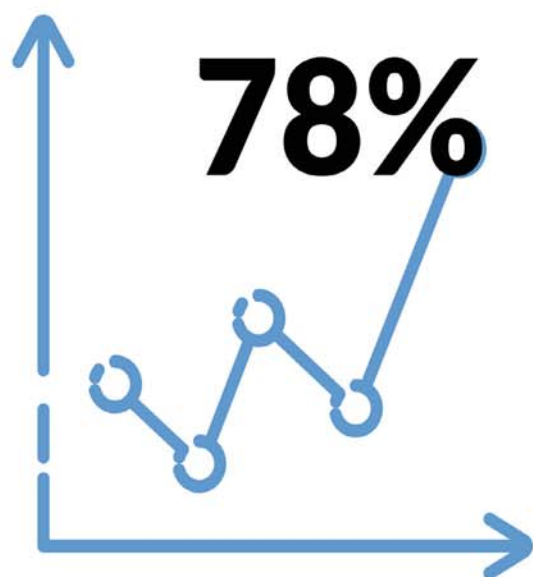
At *Club Insider*, we are excited to be in our **28th Year** of this home-based health and fitness club trade publication! The thought that this publication was *founded to serve an industry I truly love*, and so that *I could become a Mister Mom for my son, Justin*, is still intriguing and amazing to 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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Point - Counterpoint

Fitness IS Medicine

By: **Cosmo Wollan**

Mike Alpert's May article on *Medical Fitness* makes some very good points. *Exercise is medicine*. And, a virtual nutritionist can certainly add some value to your facility. But, while nutrition is a highly beneficial and proven component to better overall health, it is not, strictly speaking, "exercise." So, with due respect to Mr. Alpert, let's look at the dictionary definition of Medicine: "*The art or science of restoring or preserving health or due physical condition.*" Then, expand the picture to include all the ancillary services and modalities that can contribute to the desired results.

Broaden the scope. Look at the goals, not the methods. *FITNESS is medicine*. A diet is not better health; instead a pathway to better health; losing the weight is better health. Stretching is not better health; achieving greater flexibility is better health. Exercise is medicine focuses on the modality. Fitness is medicine looks at the desired results.

COVID caused countless clubs to close, many forever. Now, as those that weathered the storm begin to re-open and re-engage, they have two driving priorities: *Generate Revenue and Remain Open*.

True sustainability, answering both challenges successfully, requires looking at a new paradigm, a new business model. A model that can service a new audience, drive new revenue and help the facility qualify as "essential" should another pandemic scenario occur. That paradigm is Medical Fitness. More specifically, medically-integrated and medically-directed fitness services.

Don't panic. You won't need lots of new, expensive equipment, fancy machines or high-paid clinical staff. You do need a sound business model and a good, long-term game plan.

It's much more than just adding nutrition or assisted stretching. Think *Fitness is Medicine*. Remember, you want outcomes, not just program buzzwords. Focus on the desired result of population health. Cultivate relationships with local physical therapy practices and look to add post-orthopedic and post-cardiac rehab training capabilities. Create relationships with local medical practices and garner referrals for weight loss programs, hypertension management programs and diabetes management programs. And, remember, physicians telling their patients to go to the gym is not a referral. Telling a specific patient to go to a specific gym for their weight loss program is a referral.



Cosmo Wollan

Dr. Jason Conviser once said, "*There is not one disease in the ICD-10 Coding Book that cannot be prevented, mitigated or improved by the use of exercise.*" By adopting these new programs and truly integrating them into your business model, you can attract a new audience who typically will have little problem paying to regain, refresh or improve their health, and in doing so, create a wealth of new profit centers. Offer solutions; don't just sell programs.

I am not saying this is easy... However, it is not complicated, although the devil is in the details. Your trainers must be properly credentialed. Your protocols must be medically-directed, and that requires well-developed and carefully cultivated relationships with local medical providers. Your business models must be consistent with your existing pricing and comfortable to your local demographics. Your marketing must be results-oriented, and your "sales" must be outcomes-driven, not price-driven. Remember, people want, and will purchase, solutions to their admitted problems. Most do not like to be "sold."

For several years, IHRSA and others have been lobbying in Washington D.C. to enact legislation that will recognize health clubs as necessary to population health. They are trying to get the Government to change the rules. I wish them well, and I truly hope they succeed. But, I am tired of waiting. So, let's change the paradigm instead. Fitness is Medicine, and medical fitness belongs in commercial clubs. The Government may see the light... eventually. We can affect change now.

(Cosmo Wollan has more than 25 years of experience in the health and fitness space. He is Senior Executive at Synergy Cubed, a fitness industry consulting firm, and Co-Founder of the Fitness Is Medicine Initiative, whose mission is to bring medically-directed fitness services and population health benefits to commercial health clubs.)

Exercise IS Medicine

By: **Mike Alpert**

Although I do not know **Cosmo Wollan**, I want to thank him for reading my recent article and for taking the time to give his input and opinion on Exercise and Fitness. A counter-perspective is always a good thing, and we can certainly learn from them. After all, that is what makes our country so fantastic: people are encouraged to have different opinions on a subject or issue, and we should all be open to listening and considering their point of view. We can then come to our own conclusion.

Let me start by saying that *Exercise is Medicine* is a term that I referred to back in the early 1990s when I was a *Managing Partner at The Athletic Club of Bend*, in Bend, Oregon. I saw the powerful effect that exercise had on children we were working with who were struggling with severe physical challenges. But, actually, *Exercise is Medicine* is a joint initiative between the *American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM)* and the *AMA* that was started in 2007 by my good friend and colleague, **Dr. Robert Sallis**, when he served as *President of ACSM*. It has been endorsed by the *U.S. Surgeon General* and is a trademarked phrase.

In my last article, I begin the 3rd paragraph by saying that "*overall health*," includes nutrition, as well as exercise. So, I was not insinuating that nutrition was exercise but rather that it is and should be part of a person's overall fitness program in order for them to obtain optimal health. So many club members don't think that they need nutritional counseling because they are working out regularly. Yet, over the years, I have seen the same members doing cardio and strength workouts, perspiring profusely, and their body image never seemed to change. From talking with members over 30 years, I would ask them if they had eaten and hydrated prior to their workouts, and the high majority that did their workouts early in the morning or came to the club after work would invariably say they had not. Without fuel in the gas tank, the car won't run, and without food in your body, you will burn muscle instead of fat.

It is just my opinion and one that I feel very strongly about: exercise and proper nutrition should go hand-in-hand. And, *Exercise is Medicine's* goal is to merge health care with fitness. It includes traditional medical care, integrated medicine, complimentary care, mental health, stretching and nutrition. It is the whole package.

Cosmo is spot on with his points on physician referrals. Doctors will be



Mike Alpert

looking for highly credentialed specialists who they feel comfortable sending their patients to. It should not be about building your bottom line, but rather, having the personnel and programs that will render positive outcomes in a safe and inviting environment. And, it is critical to develop and maintain strong relationships with physicians, clinicians and hospital CEOs in your community. They need to be part of the continuum of care, even after traditional care has been exhausted.

At *The Claremont Club*, we chose to develop our programs around people who were struggling with chronic injuries and chronic illnesses. One reason we did this was because we felt that these were people who needed us the most and could afford us the least. Many times, I spoke with people who had lost their home or car and worried everyday about how they would be able to feed their family or take care of their children. They had been forced to deplete so much of their earnings, and in many cases, were unable to work. So, for far too many, money will be an issue and no matter how good your results might be, they will not be able to afford to be in the program. They deserve and need to be, so you must do your best to work with a non-profit in your community and also be committed to doing your share of fundraising.

The good news is that, in many cases, insurance is reimbursing for fitness and nutrition programs, and I know that third party reimbursement for at-risk populations with chronic health issues is coming soon!

So, thank you Cosmo for your comments and input. I know you are fighting the good fight.

And, **Exercise is Medicine**, and it is the strongest medicine we have today.

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

...Norm's Notes

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can get this rehab work done. Yesterday, 13 days since my surgery date, I went for my third rehab session with **MS. KAITLYN BOONE, PT, DPT, Physical Therapist in Marietta, Georgia.** Young Kaitlyn does an excellent and thorough job in our one-hour therapy sessions at the *Advanced Therapy Rehab Center* about one mile from my home.

But, folks, there's more! Awakening well rested at 5:30AM on May 15, 2021, a beautiful Saturday morning, I made my coffee, and while the coffee was perking, I walked out to pick up my *Saturday Edition of The Marietta Daily Journal.* I must explain to you that I'm mentioning this only because I walked out and picked up the paper without any pain at all in my recently operated on right hip! So, folks, if you've never experienced the need for hip surgery, you'll be surprised at how wonderful such an event as a *pain free... limp free walk outside to pick up a newspaper can be!* **TRUST me here** as I share this experience with you that a pain free, limp free walk to pick up a morning newspaper was actually a **FUN and EXCITING event in my life!** You know me folks... **MAKE IT FUN!!!** *Hmmm... you've heard/read these words before, haven't you?* **YAHOO! THANKS and APPRECIATION TO ALL!!!**

■Before I move on, I think it's *totally appropriate and very important* right this minute that I also **HEAP a pile of PRAISE, THANKS and SINCERE APPRECIATION** onto my son, **JUSTIN CATES,** for the excellent job he's being doing on *Club Insider* for the 28 years we've been publishing, but especially, during the past year-plus since he became our *Publisher* on April 5, 2020 after I went blind for 2.5 months from the Retinal Stroke in my right eye and then the cataract in my left eye. It would not be an exaggeration at all were I to tell you that I could have looked for 100 years and not have found a better partner to have than my son, Justin Cates! **Just "Tellin' It Like It Is" folks! THANK YOU, JUSTIN CATES! I love you, Son!**

■Welcome to **Mark Williamson** and **ClubIntel** as they join *Club Insider's* **Adverting Team.** ClubIntel's services are designed to help you uncover and capitalize on the most powerful drivers of brand loyalty and advocacy; **lasting and profitable** human connections. With offerings across **Insight & Research and Consultation & Guidance,** ClubIntel can provide the data and edge you need. **Insight. Inspiration. Impact.** Check out **ClubIntel's Ad** on **Page #18.**

■Thank you to **COSMO WOLLAN** and **MIKE ALPERT** for taking part in a **Point - Counterpoint** about **Exercise/Fitness is Medicine.** You can view their **Articles** on **Page #6.**

■**BIG NEWS out of IHRSA.** Dated *April 30, 2021,* it was announced that *IHRSA is restructuring its Membership Options...* In a move to be more inclusive and flexible, IHRSA has unveiled a new, tiered structure that provides increased choices for membership and benefits to help the fitness industry succeed. Check out the **Press Release** on **Page #18.**

■**BRENT DARDEN, IHRSA's Interim President and CEO,** does a weekly report he calls "**Take 5,**" in which he comments on some of the week's most important and interesting developments. As the **GYMS Act** builds momentum, *it's now had over 14,000 phone calls of support and has over 110 supporters signed on in Congress.* Brent shared a big update on the **GYMS Act** and data from a new wellness report that hints that the fitness industry is getting ready for a big comeback. Brent also announced a new partnership and gave a quick update about the *IHRSA CEO search.* And, he shared details on an upcoming webinar with a member of the *Apple Watch Health Team.*

Let me throw in a comment about Brent Darden. Brent also commented in this *Take 5* that IHRSA's Board is soon to announce the *new IHRSA CEO* after he has served as *IHRSA's Interim CEO since September 2020.* I doubt that I will find any arguments about the following comment I'm going to make here because this comment is the flat-out truth. My comment is about the *amazingly dedicated and excellent job* Brent Darden has done for all of us who care about IHRSA. Brent was a highly respected industry veteran long before this pandemic devastated our industry. But, after the world class job of

work and leadership Brent has provided at IHRSA since September when he stepped in as IHRSA's Interim President and CEO, he will forever be known as one of the greatest contributors to our IHRSA cause in the 40-year history of the Association and our industry at large. **I, as IHRSA's 1st President in 1981, and IHRSA's Co-Founder with my friend, RICK CARO, want to sincerely Thank You, Brent, for the truly excellent job you've done for all of us while the entire world's population and everybody in our industry has fought this pandemic literally for our survival. GOD BLESS YOU, BRENT!**

■In addition to his weekly "*Take 5,*" **Brent Darden** also hosts something called, "**Talks and Takes,**" which was an excellent online presentation. To say this was an extremely interesting and informative show by a very experienced and talented panel of speakers simply *does NOT* do it justice! Suffice it to say that, if you view anything online in the next 24 hours, I'd suggest that you view this because you will be glad you did! Brent's fellow panelists included: **BILL McBRIDE, Co-founder, President, and CEO, Active Wellness as well as Club Insider Contributing Author;** **BLAIR McHANEY, industry giant CEO, MXM and Owner of Worx Health Clubs;** and the lovely 30-year industry veteran, **ALLISON FLATLEY of ALLISON FLATLEY, Consulting,** who was filling in for the also lovely, **SARA COOPERMAN, CEO, SCW Fitness Education and WATERinMOTION.** Folks, you can access this great presentation now by going to **www.talksandtakes.com** where you will find it and four previous "Talks and Takes" presentations.

■Speaking of IHRSA, the Association's **JAKE LANDRY,** has delivered these recent legislative news items:

■**Florida Bill to Create Sales Tax Holiday Sent to Governor for Signature -** Lawmakers in Florida recently passed **H.B.7061,** a bill to create a sales-tax holiday for specific purchases in the state during "*Freedom Week,*" which will run July 1 - 7, 2021.

■**California Bill Regulating Automatically Renewing Contracts Passes Assembly -** **A.B.390,** a bill which would regulate automatically renewing contracts resulting from free trials or promotional offers in California, was passed by the California State Assembly and will now proceed to the Senate for consideration.

■**Texas, Colorado, Illinois and Delaware have passed Bills Requiring Notification Before Auto-Renewal Voted Favorably by Committee.**

■**Hawaii, West Virginia and Maryland have all adjourned for 2021.**

■**Powerful Insights. Candid Discussions. Global Impact.** As is my custom, it's important that I remind you about important upcoming industry events, and **Club Industry's June 16 - 17 Future of Fitness Event** is on my calendar, and it **should be on your calendar, too!** Check out the following, and **Save the Date:**

The **2021 Future of Fitness Global Virtual Event** will dive into the most vital topics in our industry.

(See *Norm's Notes* Page 8)

Pride and Discipline: The Legacy of Jack LaLanne

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).**

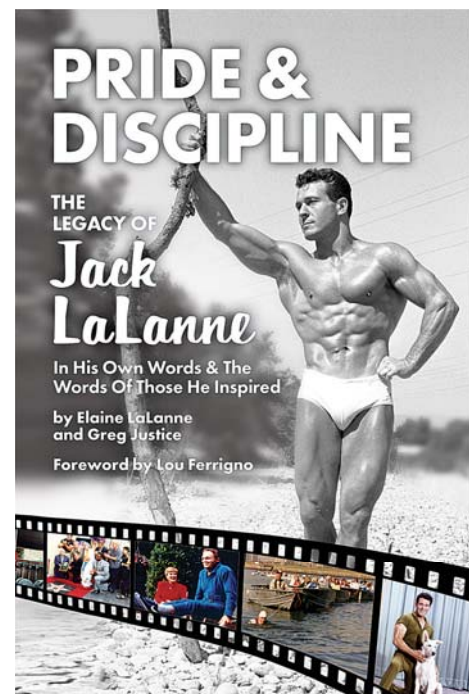
This is a book nearly 100 years in the making, and it includes some never seen before material by Jack LaLanne, along with a timeline of Jack's life. To say these pages are full of motivation, inspiration and life-changing material is an understatement, and we're so excited to share it with the world.

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: Order Your Copy and receive a copy of "*You Are An Architect*" (A never seen before column written by Jack LaLanne).

Order Today

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...Norm's Notes

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Club Industry's 2021 Future of Fitness Agenda-at-a-Glance:

- Trends to Watch in 2021;
- How Democratic Control Could Impact the Fitness Industry During the Next Four Years;
- Reactivate Frozen Members Scared by COVID-19;
- Wins and Losses During the COVID-19 Shutdowns and What We Can Learn for Next Time;
- Hybrid Gym Models That Are Working;
- The Future of Studios;
- The Future of Not-For-Profits;
- Lifting Up Women and People of Color;
- Being Resilient During Times of Crisis;
- Overcoming Fear: How to Move the Gym Intimidated Through Your Doors;

What to Expect: With our virtual events, we are putting education first. Divided into short but in-depth presentations full of many applicable takeaways, the event will feature keynotes, panel discussions and breakout sessions. The virtual environment is perfect for attendees to understand best

practices or get a deep dive into industry challenges and trends. Chat with fellow fitness and wellness professionals from around the world, interact with speakers, and hear from your favorite vendors. The official event hashtag is **#ReinventNow**, to join the conversation before, during and after the event on social media.

To sign up today, please go to futureoffitness.clubindustry.com.

■ Speaking of *Saving the Date*, be sure you have **October 13 - 15** scheduled and that you will be in **Dallas, Texas** for **IHRSA 2021**, the **Association's 40th Anniversary!** Check out **IHRSA's Ad on Page #19**.

■ **MOLLIE ANN HOLT**, our friend in Las Vegas, is promoting **The 7th Semi-Annual Mabank, Texas CAR-TRUCK-MOTORCYCLE-BOAT and OFFROAD SHOW**, which is set for **June 12th and 19th**, from **10AM to 3PM**. The events are **FREE TO THE PUBLIC**, and all donations of items sold will go to *Feed The Hungry Corporation 501.c.3*. *The Hungry Corporation* is partnering with *Dickey's Barbecue Pit*, *the Faith at Work Ministries*, *The Catering Guy, LLC* and

Dickey's Barbeque Pt Rowlett to build a 10,000 square-foot Food Warehouse in Mabank, Texas. Public contributions go to: *Feed The Hungry Corporation*, 101 South Third Street, Mabank, Texas, 75147. For information, contact **Guy New**, Director at guynew@fthcorp.org or (972) 345 - 8426 or **Mollie Ann Holt**, Associate Director at mollieannholt@fthcorp.org or (310) 321 - 2390.

■ **JUSTIN** and I want to say **THANKS** and express our **APPRECIATION** to you all for reading **Club Insider!**

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■ **God bless our troops, airmen and**

sailors worldwide and keep them safe. Thank you, Congratulations and Welcome Home to all of our troops who have served around the world. God bless America's Policemen and women and Firemen and women; keep them safe. God bless our EMTs, first responders, nurses, doctors, lab technicians and anyone who is helping make Coronavirus a thing of the past. You and your families are our warriors. Finally, God bless you, your family, your club(s) and your members. God Bless America! Laus Deo!

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

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Over 100 Members of Congress Now Support the GYMS Act

BOSTON, MA - After a year of working tirelessly to demonstrate to Congress the health and fitness industry is in dire need of financial relief, the effort is paying off. We have reached the impressive milestone of **103 co-sponsors** for the **Gym Mitigation & Survival (GYMS) Act (H.R. 890)**. U.S. Reps. **Mike Quigley (D-IL)** and **Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA)** filed the GYMS Act to bring dire financial assistance to health and fitness clubs, gyms and studios impacted by the pandemic.

Fitness industry professionals have sent over 27,000 messages to Congress. These communications have helped bring 103 co-sponsors from 28 states, plus Washington, D.C., and Guam. The most recent sponsors include U.S. Reps: **Teresa Leger Fernandez (D-NM)**, **John Katko (R-NY)**, **Daniel T. Kildee (D-MI)**, **Brian Higgins (D-NY)**, **Paul Tonko (D-NY)**, **Jimmy Panetta (D-CA)**, **Henry Cuellar (D-TX)** and **Jake LaTurner (R-KS)**.


Public health and wellness are top of mind for the health and fitness industry. *IHRSA*, *The Global Health and Fitness Association*, and *CGC*, the *Community Gyms Coalition*, joined forces to bring attention to the critical role the fitness industry plays in public health and the lack of aid these facilities have received through

the crisis.

While other industries that were forced to close have received industry-specific financial assistance throughout the pandemic, the health and fitness industry has been overlooked. With the effects and financial burden of government-mandated COVID-related shutdowns and restrictions still looming over the fitness industry, the strong and growing support in Congress to provide industry-specific relief is encouraging.

"We are grateful to see so many members of Congress acknowledging the tremendous need to provide relief for America's gyms and fitness facilities, who through no fault of their own, have been devastated by both COVID-19 and government-mandated shutdowns," said **Brent Darden**, *IHRSA Interim President and CEO*. "The fitness industry has always highlighted the importance of wellbeing and exists specifically to provide a safe space for individuals from all segments of society to be active and enjoy all the benefits associated with leading a healthy lifestyle. Our industry needs financial relief to continue providing the nation with these vital services."

To learn more about the GYMS Act, visit nationalhealthandfitness.org.

A close-up photograph of a man's muscular arm and shoulder as he lifts a large, black, octagonal dumbbell. The dumbbell has a textured, concentric ring pattern and the number '40' and 'IRON GRIP' are printed on its face. The man is wearing a dark blue tank top. A red line graphic starts from the top left, goes down, then diagonally across the middle, and then down again towards the bottom right corner.

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...Augie's Quest

continued from page 3

An Interview With Shannon Shryne, President and Co-Founder, and Gretchen Simoneaux, Vice President, Augie's Quest to Cure ALS

Club Insider (C.I.) - For those who may not have read our stories about Augie's Quest in the past or do not know about the organization, please tell us about **Augie Nieto and Augie's Quest**.

Augie's Quest (AQ) - Augie's Quest was co-founded in 2005 by Augie Nieto, the successful fitness industry mogul behind *Lifecycle* and *Life Fitness* who was diagnosed with ALS in 2005. A visionary leader dedicated to maintaining muscle strength, fitness and performance, Augie made his career building successful global businesses and driving modern day fitness forward, impacting millions of people. Today, Augie's inexorable drive to work and achievement remains steadfast, turning his focus and business acumen on ALS, taking on the disease like no other. With Augie's Quest, Augie and his wonderful wife, **Lynne**, are transforming the way ALS research is funded, approaching it in completely new, unprecedented ways. Most important, we're seeing real results!

Augie's Quest to Cure ALS is dedicated to changing the experience of people living with ALS. We raise the funds and awareness urgently needed to advance cutting-edge research, fast-track effective treatments, and ultimately, find a cure for this devastating disease. **We believe ALS is curable; it's just underfunded.**

C.I. - Just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Augie's Quest announced **\$2.7 million in grants** to the *ALS Therapy Development Institute (ALS TDI)*, as well as the establishment of the *Augie's Quest Translational Center at ALS TDI*. Please tell us about those developments.

AQ - Augie's Quest granted \$2.7 million to ALS TDI in 2020 and more than twice that number in 2019. The Augie's Quest Translational Research Center was established in January of 2020. We continue to fund the work being done to translate the science into effective treatments.

Overcoming recent fundraising challenges, we partnered with likeminded individuals and foundations to accomplish our goals through collaboration. For example, we partnered with the *Eddie and Jo Allison Smith Foundation* to fund the first 100 ALS patients to be enrolled in *ALS TDI's Precision Medicine Program* in 2021.

In May 2021, in honor of *ALS Awareness Month*, we provided another grant that will be used in the following ways:

1. Therapeutic target discovery using human-induced pluripotent stem cells within the Augie's Quest Translational Research Center.

2. Expanded drug discovery model development.

3. Human blood-based biomarker discovery and validation.

C.I. - Over the years, in-person events have been crucial to the fundraising success of Augie's Quest. Given the pandemic and the suspension of in-person events, how did Augie's Quest modify its fundraising efforts?

AQ - In-person events, specifically those run by our fitness partners, are the backbone of our successful fundraising strategy. When the pandemic forced us to cancel our *BASH Event at IHRSA* in March of 2020, Augie's Quest had to re-evaluate. Like everyone, we were hopeful it would be a speedbump that only lasted for a short time, instead of what we now know was well over a year. We're fortunate that we have incredible leaders and advisors, especially on our *Fitness Advisory Council*, who helped us weather the storm. So many of our partners that normally buy sponsorships to our big events chose to donate directly instead. Some partners and friends donated more than they had in the past, and with no event expenses, it made all the difference to our quest to find a cure.

C.I. - What level of fundraising has been accomplished during the COVID-19 pandemic? How were costs cut to balance loss of fundraising revenue?

AQ - We increased our digital fundraising objectives and decreased our expenses. Augie's Quest has always been lean and mean; we have countless volunteers that help us accomplish our goals. We don't have an actual office or a great deal of overhead, so 2019 was our strongest fundraising year since our inception. Then, in 2020, we were able to work with our research partner, ALS TDI, to continue to move research forward using those funds and the dollars raised in 2020.

C.I. - What is the status of the Quest for the Cure? Phase 2 Trial of AT-1501? Any other candidates?

AQ - We know that ALS is a complex disease and will take more than one treatment to help all those affected. The support of the fitness industry and other AQ and ALS TDI donors funded the creation of AT-1501 at ALS TDI. This therapeutic is now in *Phase 2A Trials* thanks to *Eledon Pharmaceuticals*.

It's estimated that 54 adult patients with ALS in the United States will be enrolled in the study at 12 separate



Ribbon Cutting for the Augie's Quest Translational Center at ALS TDI

ALS treatment sites. Once patients are established in the study, they will receive four ascending doses of AT-1501 via IV infusion in each of the sequentially enrolling cohorts. Each participant will receive six bi-weekly infusions of AT-1501 over an 11-week period, according to clinicaltrials.gov.

We are proud to partner with ALS TDI to fund critical science and drug development at the Augie's Quest Translational Research Center and are excited for new and emerging scientific developments. The success of AT-1501 proves the process works, and there are new candidates we're seeking funding to move toward clinical trials. Our friends at ALS TDI are excited about several candidates, and we'll announce more information when we are able.

C.I. - As we see light at the end of the COVID-19 tunnel, what in-person events for Augie's Quest are coming up?

AQ - Augie and Lynne were vaccinated, and we're looking forward to in-person events again this fall. We have two large events planned in October, and in 2022, we are laser-focused on bringing back some campaigns we've had to put on hold in 2020 and 2021.

The entire ALS community is behind *Major League Baseball's 'Lou Gehrig' Day* on June 2 and 3. Additionally, we're launching our *Hustle for the Muscle* campaign this month! Every 90 minutes, someone is diagnosed with ALS. Dedicate your 90-minute workout to those living with

ALS and raise critical funds and awareness for ALS. Register and create your personal fundraising page and set your goal high. Go to bit.ly/clubinsider128.

C.I. - What can our readers do to help?

AQ - If you'd like to help fundraise, create a Facebook fundraiser, choose Augie's Quest for your Amazon Smile account, or register for *Hustle for the Muscle*. If you'd like to spread awareness, follow Augie's Quest on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, and re-share our posts with your network.

C.I. - Finally, how is Augie doing?

AQ - Augie is strong and resilient. These last two years haven't been easy on anyone, and Augie is excited about what the future can bring.

■ ■ ■

My sincere *Thanks and Appreciation* to **Shannon Shryne** and **Gretchen Simoneaux** for this extensive update on Augie's Quest. And, of course, thank you to **Augie and Lynne Nieto** for their inspiration in this endeavor for 16 years now. **The cure for ALS will be found!!!**

(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.)



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...The St. James

continued from page 3

An Interview With Craig Dixon and Kendrick Ashton, Co-Founders and Co-CEOs of The St. James

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

Craig Dixon (CD) - I was born in Brooklyn, New York, but when I was about three years old, we moved to Montgomery County, Virginia. The Washington D.C. area is really home for me. That's where I grew up and where my parents still live. They live about 45 minutes away from me now, and it's been great because they've been able to watch the entire progression and building of The St. James, including seeing it come out of the ground. This is really cool, because my father was a contractor. I grew up working on construction sites, every holiday and every summer as a kid, working with him. He went from being a contractor in construction and seeing owners and developers build things to having his son be the one who's building something. I think it has been a real treat for him.

C.I. - That's wonderful! Well, I look forward to talking more about the building of The St. James here in a little bit. How about you, Kendrick?

Kendrick Ashton (KA) - I was born and raised in Washington D.C. I'm a sixth-generation Washingtonian. My family on both sides came to Washington in the late 1870s, early 1880s, so I'm a through-and-through Washingtonian.

C.I. - Where did you go to school and what did you study? Did you play any sports?

CD - Growing up, I was very active in sports. I started off in soccer and also did track and swimming. Then, by the time I got to high school, I shifted to football, track and wrestling. So, sports have been a big part of my life for the entirety of my life. It's something I've always been passionate about. I went to the *College of William & Mary* for undergrad, majoring in Finance. Then, I



Craig Dixon and Kendrick Ashton

went to Law School at William & Mary as well. I started my career as a lawyer, then later, I went to *Harvard Business School* to do one of their long-term executive programs as I started to really build out my transition to a more entrepreneurial path. Education has been a really big part of my life, and it is really important to my family. My parents are immigrants from Jamaica and always emphasized the importance of getting an education.

KA - I played sports intensely year-round all the way through college. I played football, basketball, baseball and a little bit of lacrosse growing up. I played football, baseball and ran track in high school. Then, I played football at the College of William & Mary where I was a four-year starter and an all-conference cornerback. I studied International Relations and Economics at William & Mary. Then, I went to the Law School and Business School at the *University of Chicago*.

A True Friendship and Business Partnership

C.I. - Wow, those are fantastic educational

and sports backgrounds! When and how did you both meet?

CD - Kendrick and I met at the cafeteria at William & Mary in late summer of 1994. We've been best friends ever since, so we go all the way back to college together. We are very close. We were fraternity brothers; our wives were sorority sisters; we were in each other's weddings. He is one of my oldest and closest friends, so it's a real treat to be able to build a business with someone with whom you share so much history and trust.

KA - We had a great time together in college. We were and are great friends, and it has been a lot of fun to build this business together.

C.I. - I love it! How did *The St. James* come to be?

CD - We always talked about different ideas and opportunities that could be worth pursuing. I always knew that I wanted to be an entrepreneur. As I said before, my parents are entrepreneurs. Everybody in my family is a small businessperson, so it was in my blood. And, I think Kendrick had a similar vision for his life. As we went through our professional careers and got really great experiences, we continued to keep our eye out for opportunities that might meet both our professional backgrounds but also connected to our passions. The idea for The St. James really checked all the boxes, because it was both something that we thought was a significant opportunity and could be national, potentially international, in its scope.

As well as allowing us to be in a business that connects with our passions for sports, it's really compatible with the way we want to live our lives, both individually and with our families: an active life that continues to engage with and derive lessons and values from sports because they were such a powerful part of

our formation as children and young adults. So, the opportunity to build The St. James was really a combination of those two objectives, and we're really, really excited about it.

Once we recognized the idea itself comes from our experiences growing up in this region and being 'irrationally passionate' about sports, we then recognized two high demand problems existed and they have certainly only gotten worse as time has gone on:

1. There are not enough courts, turf, ice, pools, etc. to meet the demand of people who want to access them. Then, to the extent that these surfaces do exist, they are often in poor repair and under-programmed.

2. There is a high degree of fragmentation among offerings in the marketplace. Families with children in sports have to run from one side of town to take a child to soccer practice and then the other side of town to take a child to a basketball game. And, if the parents themselves are busy, it can be a real challenge to figure out logistics.

C.I. - I lived that multiple-sport practice life, so I know exactly what you're talking about! Practice, practice, practice!

CD - This is the stuff that our parents were doing when we were kids. Now, I have three children, Kendrick has two children, so we were transporting them around to all of these different activities. Along the way, the conversations we would have with other parents were very similar... the experience as a parent waiting there was often lackluster. Can you get a decent cup of coffee? Can you get Wi-Fi? And, if you have one of your other children with you, they're climbing the walls because they're bored and want to leave.

Given those experiences, we thought there was a real opportunity to solve a problem that no one else was really solving. We concluded that we could aggregate the play and training surfaces for multiple sports, 20 sports or so in one venue, with coaches and trainers, then wrap it in a hospitality experience with a premium health club, a full-service restaurant and an active entertainment center geared towards young people. So, if we combined all of these experiences into one package, and because we would control the venue, how it's designed and how it's operated, we could offer a consistently high-quality experience to everyone who walks through our doors, which is not something that has existed in this space, at least not in the way that we would at The St. James.

Planning for Greatness

C.I. - That's fantastic. I'm curious. How did (See *The St. James* Page 13)



The St. James

THE ST. JAMES

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...The St. James

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the name come about?

CD - The St. James really comes from the idea of being the 'center of the universe,' so when we say 'The St. James,' that's really what we're thinking about it. To put a finer point on it, as we mentioned, we both went to the College of William & Mary, which was founded by the British monarchy. For a 300+ year period, the *Court of St. James* was the 'center of the universe' for everything diplomatic and economic in the British Empire.

As we thought about developing a brand, we thought about that. We believed it was going to be critically important to have this destination be the foundation of a premium brand. If you look at sports venues that focus on youth participants, that was not something done particularly often, so we thought there was an opportunity to create a highly differentiated, premium experience. And, in turn, you need to have a really great brand to help communicate the quality of the experience that every guest was going to receive. They go hand-in-hand.

So, we thought it was a name that had an inherent sense of trustworthiness and an enduring quality to it. And, because it also represents the idea of being the

'center of the universe,' which is what we want The St. James to be in every community in which we build one.

C.I. - Let me add: Not knowing too much about The St. James before researching it for this story, when I saw the name 'The St. James,' I expected to see something grand and great. As I began researching, that's exactly what happened. I was blown away! You nailed it.

CD - Thank you.

C.I. - You're very welcome. Well, let's move into the construction phase a little bit. Craig, I know you're going to love talking about this one because of your dad's background, as well as yours, really. Let's start by talking about the facility site selection.

CD - When we set out to identify a site for The St. James, we really came at it from a data-driven perspective. At the outset, we really were not focused on Washington as the place to build this business. Sometimes, people assume that, because Kendrick and I are from this region, that is the reason we started the business in the D.C. region, but we let the data drive our decision. When you look at this region, the high levels of sports participation and the large and growing population and density, Washington became the logical place to

start this business.

So, that's the starting point. Then, when you drop a layer down and you think about the size of the footprint of these destinations, you really need a large piece of land, and you want to make sure you have very good proximity to the transportation infrastructure. So, we looked at every large parcel of land in the Washington region that was in any way close to I-495, otherwise known as the Beltway, which is the interstate that circles the entirety of the DC region, as well as I-95 and I-395, in order to identify prospective sites. Then, we went through a process of elimination based on a couple of factors. Obviously, you look at the data around prospective customers and their proximity to that location. You have to look at pricing and the ability to acquire the site. Then, zoning because you will not be able to build what you want by right in every jurisdiction. Some jurisdictions have a much more difficult zoning process than others. Therefore, once you go through that combination of screens, you find yourself in a place where you have a handful of sites that are actionable. We spent a lot of time studying, and we found what we felt was the right site. It was once owned by *Washington Gas*, which is one of the largest natural gas utilities in the region.

The more time we spent on the site, the more we became convinced it was

ideal. It's a stone's throw from I-395 and I-495, which are the two main highways that run through the region and through Northern Virginia in particular. The traffic counts of the vehicles that pass through the intersection of those two highways are off the charts. We were also attracted to the opportunity to be in Fairfax County, which is one of the largest and most affluent jurisdictions in the region, and frankly, the country. When you say to yourself that you want to be in the backyards of your core customers, it's hard to find a piece of land this large that has proximity to the transportation infrastructure and is also in the backyard of your core customer, all at once. So, that's how we landed on the site.

C.I. - Please take us through the construction process for such a large facility.

CD - The construction process took about 20 months. There was a building on the site that had been the Operations Center for Washington Gas for years, so we had to demolish that building. It had asbestos insulation, which complicated things, so that took three months. Then, it took about 17 months to build, and we opened in September of 2018.

C.I. - Related to financing, how did you put that together?

(See *The St. James* Page 14)

...The St. James

continued from page 13

CD - First, Kendrick and I invested a substantial portion of our own capital into the business. We then raised some money from friends and family. Then, we went through a process to identify an equity partner and lender that would be able to help us complete the financing. We partnered with *Cane International*, which is a global real estate and private equity platform that's headquartered in London and New York and is the real estate platform for a firm called *Eldridge Industries*. Eldridge is a global investment firm and asset management firm that has investment and real estate, sports and entertainment, financial services and several other verticals. We partnered with Cane and Eldridge because they have deep experience in hospitality and real estate, including development, sports and entertainment. We wanted to have partners who not only believe in our thesis but could help add value to what we're doing, and we have certainly found that in Cane and Eldridge. That's how we were able to finance the company and the development. We've been really, really pleased with the quality of the relationship. They've been great partners.

The St. James

C.I. - Well, that takes us through development. Let's talk about The St. James. Let's begin with the Health Club. Please describe the facility (Size and Square Footage, Amenities, Programs/Services, etc).

CD - The Health Club is three stories, 50,000 square feet, with an array of state-of-the-art fitness equipment, treadmills, free weights, benches, a customizable *OutRace* structure, exercise accessories, plus sauna, steam room and more. In regular times, it's open 24/7 for our members. One of the highlights is our *High Performance*

Center, which is an elite training space that rivals any college or professional setup for strength and conditioning for athletes. Housed in the Health Club are our dance and yoga studios, which host group fitness classes as well as dance programming and a Pilates reformer studio. We offer Personal Training in individual, couple and small group options. Members can enjoy more than 75 group fitness classes complimentary each week, ranging from bootcamps and HIIT to yoga, barre and cycling classes. In addition, members with children can add their kids to their memberships and receive up to three hours of complimentary childcare so they can enjoy our facilities while their children are having fun.

C.I. - The Health Club alone is impressive, but the rest of The St. James is simply incredible. Coming in at 450,000 square feet, it literally has something for everyone across a wide array of sports and fitness disciplines. Please briefly describe each offering:

CD - Absolutely, our offerings include:

■ **Field House:** At 110,000 square feet, the Field House regularly hosts football, lacrosse, soccer and rugby programming. We also offer the space for special events like dance performances, obstacle courses, corporate retreats, concerts, overnight graduation parties and a variety of other mixed-use purposes. In the past, we've hosted professional teams for practices and play, including *D.C. United*, teams from the *Premier Lacrosse League* and *U.S. Women's Soccer*. The St. James is the proud performance training partner of *Old Glory D.C.*, D.C.'s Major League Rugby team.

■ **Court House:** The Court House features four basketball courts (or futsal courts) or nine volleyball courts.



Strength Floor of the Health Club at The St. James

■ **Pool House:** The Pool House features an Olympic-size *Myrtha* training and competition swimming pool. The pool has a moveable bulkhead to divide the pool for both long course meters and short course yards, as well as setting up a shallow end for aquatic fitness classes, learn-to-swim programs and more. Attached to the Pool House is our Water Park.

■ **Water Park:** 6,000 square-foot indoor water park, including multiple slides, multi-directional sprayers and three buckets that dump water.

■ **Hitting House:** We never worry about a rain delay in our 8,000 square-foot Hitting House. It features six batting cages with *HackAttack* machines and *HitTrax* technology for baseball and softball players.

■ **Performance House:** Our gymnastics studio is a 10,000 square-foot, soft-sided playground that includes a competition-sized springboard, in-ground trampolines, deep foam pits and a *Tumbi Trak*. Our dance programs use the space to practice tumbling, and we've even offered group fitness classes like martial arts and parkour here.

■ **Squash and Golf House:** We feature eight squash courts and six golf simulators, as well as a putting green.

■ **Ice House:** Two NHL-sized ice rinks and a viewing mezzanine.

■ **Climbing and Bouldering:** Three-story climbing wall and a bouldering wall.

C.I. - Wow, that is truly incredible. And, I know the pictures that accompany this story do not do justice to being in person at

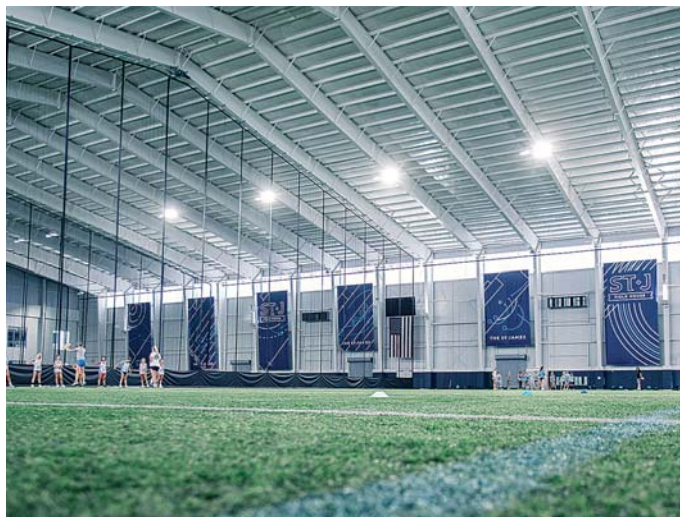
The St. James. Let's talk about operations. Obviously, we'll start from the pre-COVID perspective. Take us through The St. James' take on the membership model as well as the revenue model for your various offerings.

CD - I think one important thing to know about our revenue model is that it's a hybrid model:

■ Our membership option is not just a membership to a health club, and that's something that is one point of differentiation, because our membership is a complex membership. The important distinction is that we have a health club that is a part of the experience, but it is not the totality of the experience. We're selling a membership to the complex and access to all the different venues along with a variety of other perks. Membership is about 35% of business revenue.

■ The next big chunk is our sports business, which accounts for about 45% of the revenue model. If you think about an educational pyramid, at the base, you have a large suite of beginner classes, and that goes all the way up to the apex where your most advanced classes are. In our sports business, we have a similar approach where we have classes with 'Learn to Play' beginner programming across 20+ sports at the base then increasing levels of skill required to be in additional programs. That goes all the way up to travel teams in multiple sports: soccer, volleyball, hockey, baseball, volleyball, swimming, etc. We offer that entire pyramid of development because our mission is to be a place where we help people maximize their human potential. So, we want to be able to create a pathway for people to go as far in their

(See *The St. James* Page 15)



The Field House at The St. James

THE ST. JAMES



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sport as their ambition and ability will take them. Therefore, it's important for us to have long pathways in as many sports as possible that will unlock that opportunity.

■The remaining portion comes from our hospitality businesses, which include:

■Our restaurant called *Vim and Victor*, in which we partnered with **Spike Mendelsohn**.

■Our MedSpa called *Courted*, in which customers can get everything from manicures and pedicures, some massage, to CoolSculpting and Botox. It's a full-service and balanced spa and rejuvenation experience that appeals to both men and women.

■An active entertainment center called *Super Awesome & Amazing*, and it features a combination of birthday party rooms, climbing structures, ninja war obstacle course, e-sports, theater and VR games, as well as our indoor water park.

■And, we have our retail experience called *Strivers*, which is a combination of a sneaker boutique as well as branded performance gear, apparel and equipment.

So, we have all of those businesses, which comprise the remainder of our revenue and offer a really diverse array of experiences for everybody in the family to enjoy. Finally, there's some other ancillary revenue from things like sponsorship and events.

C.I. - That's a great breakdown. As I was researching this story, I was trying to wrap my head around everything you offer, and I understand a lot more now, for sure. In terms of a raw number of customers, how many people do you regularly serve? How many are members?

CD - Our ecosystem includes about 45,000 people who are regularly engaging with our business across the different offerings we have. Membership includes around 4,000 people at this point. We've obviously been affected by COVID like everyone else, so we're down a bit. But, we have been really encouraged by the enthusiasm and growing engagement that we have been seeing from members, both existing members as well as new members who are joining The St. James. Then, there's the levels of engagement in the sports business in particular, which really shows how consumer sentiment is starting to change. From there, our hospitality businesses, which in some cases have been the hardest hit by COVID-19, are really starting

to come back as more and more people are visiting The St. James every day, therefore creating more traffic and demand.

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

KA - We have excellent people, top to bottom, in every dimension of our business. We have really exceptional Sports Directors who lead the various pieces of our sports business, including talented former professionals and coaches. We've got incredibly effective, thoughtful, personable, motivating Personal Trainers and Group Fitness Instructors. And, we've got a world-class culinary genius in Spike Mendelsohn helping us create a really distinctive healthy cuisine that's also delicious. In our C-suite, we've got really talented people as well, so we have a really exceptional team that we built in a very short period of time.

I would also say the aggregation of the different experiences is obviously a significant point of differentiation. To be able to go from being on the ice to being in a virtual reality studio is pretty unique. To be able to go from being in soccer practice to swimming practice in a couple-hundred-yards walk is rare. That's pretty significant.

CD - Absolutely, I'll add:

■We really took a tremendous amount of

pride in developing a brand that is premium but still accessible. We think it really represents the idea of people maximizing their human potential and getting the best out of life. We're also a hospitality-driven organization. We provide customers with an experience, whether it be when they're interacting with us digitally or when they walk through our doors, that is consistent with this premium brand. It's designed in every element of what we do, all the way down to the way people smile at you when you walk through the doors and greet you with the level of enthusiasm and positive energy for what we're doing. It's something that all of our members and guests really feel and appreciate. In fact, I just had a conversation with a member this morning who was really expressing his appreciation for that.

■Then, there's the focus on the quality of our physical spaces and the programming. All of our spaces are state-of-the-art, regulation size and competition-ready. If you look at our sports venues, our Health Club and other spaces, you are immediately struck by the high level of quality that was used to design, construct and maintain every space.

■Next is the ability to utilize that space to do
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virtually whatever it is you want to do, from recreation to training to competition. The scale and breadth of our offerings provide experiences from sports to wellness to hospitality. This enables families to accommodate broad and varied interests. No longer do they have to wonder how they're going to answer their children when they wake up on Saturday morning and ask, 'What are we going to do today?' They can be told, 'We're going to The St. James,' because there will be something to enjoy for everyone in the family. That's something that we're really, really proud of.

■ There are numerous opportunities to athletically compete in the region because we host numerous leagues, events, combines, tournaments, etc. We are curating really great competitive experiences.

■ We also have great technology. We have invested significantly over the past 12 to 18 months to develop a digital experience that goes along with the physical experience of The St. James. So, you have an app that truly complements the physical experience and helps you take The St. James wherever you go on the planet, on your device of choice.

■ Finally, we have really great connectivity in the region, whether it be in the sports community or the business community. That allows us to be really in tune with what is happening in terms of changes and adjustments in consumer sentiment so that we can continually iterate our offering and keep things fresh for people.

The Pandemic

C.I. - Of course, we must discuss COVID-19. Please take us through your experience during the pandemic. Let's start

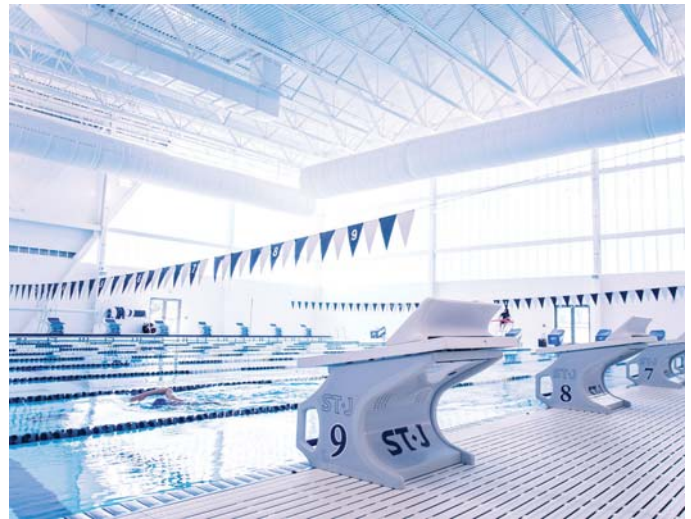
with the shutdown.

KA - As COVID-19 was emerging as a potential global issue, we were trying to prepare for it. We were trying to think through what we might need to do, but we were clueless like everybody else. We had no idea how things were going to play out. It really became an intense race to keep up with the changes that the public policy makers were making at the Federal and State levels on a near-daily basis.

We were trying to communicate with our team, implement changes in how we were operating (pre-shutdown), communicate with our members and think through the next steps on a real-time basis. We're generally pretty intense in terms of how we approach the business and our work, but it definitely ratcheted up a few notches as we were virtually around the clock trying to make sure that we were doing the right thing and thinking through every nook and cranny of what the mandates were requiring of us.

As you'll recall, gathering restrictions went from 1,000 to 500 to 250 to 100 to 10, or so. It seemed like a 72-hour window. It was a very tight window, and we were communicating feverishly with our team, with our members and with all the stakeholders in our business. It was very, very intense.

Of course, we all thought this would be a two-week to one-month kind of blip. That first month, we kept our entire team in place, because we were expecting and hopeful that we would be back and operating at some point in that window. As it became increasingly clear this was going to be a long-term shutdown, we started to make adjustments in how we were managing our workforce. After it became clear that there was going to be significant Federal support for workers, we furloughed all of our hourly staff. The next phase was to reduce compensation for the full-time staff. The next phase was to furlough as many full-time staff we could afford to while



The Pool House at The St. James

still operating on bare bones. At the same time, we kept everyone on healthcare, financing everyone's healthcare throughout the entirety of the shutdown.

C.I. - Please take us through the reopening.

KA - During the shutdown, we made significant investments in our digital platforms so that we could both communicate and train our members at home. We did a significant amount of virtual training for our fitness clients, as well as our sports customers. We stayed incredibly engaged with our community when we were shutdown.

We developed a bunch of different plans around how we would reopen. We spent a tremendous amount of time trying to figure out what the most effective tools would be to keep people safe when we reopened. We also made investments to understand who's in our complex, when and where, because we knew that capacity controls were going to be a key piece of keeping people safe and in compliance with restrictions. Of course, we invested significantly in technologies that would allow us to take temperatures as people came in the building on a contactless basis. We set up contactless transaction capabilities. And, we acquired a significant number of electrostatic sprayers to really robustly make sure that we were killing the virus on all surfaces.

We adjusted our hours and created windows of time in which we could deep clean so there weren't any sustained periods of time where people were interacting with our spaces and they weren't disinfected. Finally, we meaningfully upsized our cleaning team and put in place a strategy to clean equipment on a fairly real-time basis throughout the day.

We tried to be as thorough and

as thoughtful as we could in setting up operations for our return. The other thing we tried to do was think about the activities that were going to be as safe as possible for people to engage in. We obviously understood that spacing between and amongst people was going to be a critical part of being safe and compliant. But, in what spaces and in what ways could we allow various activities that would even more significantly enhance the level of safety? So, we moved a lot of our group fitness classes (usually held in yoga studios) into our larger venues (like the Field House). That enabled us to keep people even safer.

We worked hard to make sure we were ready to come back, but as you'll recall, the environment was very unpredictable. There were a lot of data markers that were outlined at the Federal and local levels around when we would enter the various phases that had been laid out: Phase One, Two and Three. We tried to organize ourselves around this guidance, but outside commitment to sticking to the guidance was very low. As soon as things started to get better, we were thinking, 'Okay, well, it looks like things are trending on an X weeks rate to get to a place where we're moving to the next phase.' The marks didn't get hit, and the Governor had to move the goals a little bit. So, we decided to be more cautious.

In fact, we waited six weeks after we were technically permitted to fully reopen to re-open at all, and we re-opened on July 15, 2020. When we re-opened, it was constrained to members only. We did not open the rest of our business. Our sports business stayed closed, and we didn't reopen any of our retail businesses to allow customers to just walk in. We had a modest

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The Ice House at The St. James

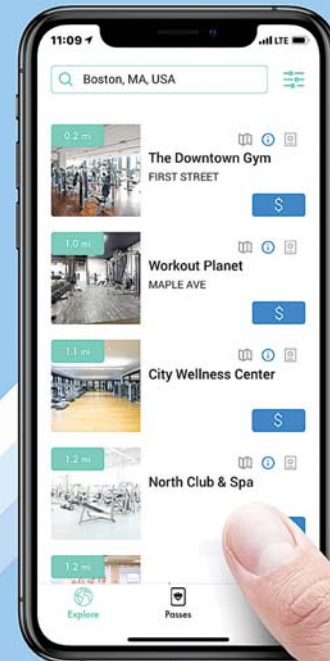
THE ST. JAMES



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level of engagement, but we certainly had people coming in who were very excited to be there and to use the complex. It's steadily grown since then, and we've been very pleased with the growth so far. Then, we re-opened our sports business on September 1. We also re-opened our restaurant, MedSpa and retail boutique in various capacities. So, for all intents and purposes, we were effectively closed from the middle of March until the beginning of September.

When a global pandemic engulfs you, you really have to make some clear-headed, wide-eyed, practical decisions about how you're going to proceed. That was a silver lining for us, as we tightened the foundation of the business significantly. It's given us a very strong base on which to build as we move into the 'new normal.'

C.I. - What are the challenges of safety now? How are you dealing with mask usage/other safety precautions for staff? Members?

KA - All the work we have done around health and safety protocols to address the risks around this pandemic made a tremendous difference for us. I believe we've built a reputation for really being

committed to safety and cleanliness. The combination of the investments we've made, as well as the procedures and protocols we put in place have been recognized by customers and the market, including local public health officials. They certainly spent a fair amount of time focused on us, and we've gotten rave reviews about how we approached things.

Now, we've been so consistent that we really haven't had any issues with compliance at all. Our community understands, but we are still approaching it cautiously. It makes sense for public policy makers to provide real-time updates in their understanding of what keeps people safe. With our customers, we are going to have a transition period where we're going to continue to ask them to wear masks. Then, we're going to essentially have an honor code approach to whether or not they're wearing masks. I think it's important to not just flip on a dime. Everybody needs to kind of understand what the rules are and be clear about that before material changes are made. We're not going to take years to do this, but we are certainly not going to do it overnight. We're working through that.

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

KA - We modeled the end of this year, early next year to get back to pre-pandemic

levels, and we're on pace to do that. I'm hopeful that we'll be ahead of that coming out of this year so we will be on a pace to exceed what we expected to do in 2020 at the top of 2022.

The Future

C.I. - A Chicago location was on the horizon. Given the pandemic, where are you in that process?

CD - The Chicago location has been designed as one of our flagships. It has an offering at a size that is similar in scope and quality as you'll find here in Springfield. We do not have a definitive timeline yet because we're really trying to not only finish the appropriate zoning processes but also take into account how COVID has impacted not only consumer sentiment but also behavior in order to make sure the destination we designed for Chicago has all the things it needs to have in order to make it successful in the post-COVID era.

I'll say that we are focused on growth. We're looking for opportunities to grow The St. James, both in the Washington region and beyond. We think there are 15 to 20 markets in the United States where we should be and where the two high-demand problems I described earlier exist. Because they possess a population size, population density and growth trajectory,

they are attractive markets for us. We also think there's significant opportunity to grow in the Washington region, and we're looking at the potential of launching some smaller concepts that can be offered together with our flagships in each region and really allow us to bring The St. James experience to more people.

C.I. - From there, what does the future hold for The St. James?

KA - We continue to believe that the brand and the various concepts we've developed for it are going to be even more in demand as we come out of this period where we've had to be away from each other and not really invest in our passions in the ways we all desire. So, we're excited about what the future holds.

The industry could not have gotten a better endorsement. I don't want to be flippant about it, but I think it's true. We could not have gotten a better public health announcement, commercial or example of the importance of investing in your wellbeing, in your wellness, than we have during this pandemic. And, we're expecting people, both for their emotional and psychological wellbeing, but also, importantly, for their physical wellbeing to be more active coming out of this. We're excited to be able to serve them.

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IHRSA Restructures Membership Options

BOSTON, MA - IHRSA, *The Global Health and Fitness Association*, is modifying its current membership structure and broadening membership opportunities to unite and assist the health and fitness industry post-COVID. To offer its members more opportunity to engage and take advantage of the benefits that best suit their needs, IHRSA will shift to a tiered benefit structure for health clubs. Developed in conjunction with a team of industry leaders, membership options for clubs will include:

Basic: This level is ideal for companies that want to engage with industry best practices, resources and experts. Operators will have access to management tools and industry insights to recover, innovate and grow their business while expanding their voice and becoming more active in public affairs.

Standard: This level is designed for operators that want to grow their business, develop skills, train staff and contribute to the industry. Operators can expect diverse insight, data-driven research and tactics to curate stronger industry relationships and help build their business.

Premium: Created for those that want to lead their company and the industry as a whole to the highest degree of success, this level includes executive insight, priority service and greater brand recognition. Expanded access to exclusive networking,

events and research, plus greater involvement in public affairs, lobbying efforts and improving the industry's image round out the premium membership.

"The new tiered membership allows IHRSA members to engage with the fitness industry at a level of their choosing, and which fits their needs best," said **Alan Leach**, *CEO of the West Wood Clubs* in Dublin, Ireland, and *Chair-Elect of the IHRSA Board of Directors*. "At a time when uniting the industry has become so important, the additional membership options provide a voice to sectors of the industry that weren't previously represented. It was a pleasure working with IHRSA and the Headlight Group to cultivate a new membership structure that focuses on meeting members where they are."

More Membership Opportunities

IHRSA will also add a **Studio Membership** and **Professional Membership**. Although hundreds of studios are currently IHRSA members, the new memberships make it easier for studios and health and fitness industry professionals to be more involved with IHRSA. Studios and industry professionals can share their voices in the industry, build new relationships, learn new skills and connect with the greater fitness industry.

The goals of the new membership

layout are to:

- Be more inclusive,
- Provide flexibility and allow members a choice in how to interact with IHRSA based on the benefits needed; and
- Assist in funding advocacy efforts and public affairs.

"The goal of the tiered membership structure and additional membership options is to provide services to virtually any professional or business in the health and fitness industry," said **Brent Darden**, *IHRSA Interim President and CEO*. "IHRSA is fighting for the entire industry's success. We hope that more clubs, studios and industry professionals will join IHRSA, become more active with advocacy and expand the industry's voice. Supporting IHRSA through memberships enhances the success of your business and the industry."

It's simply the right thing to do."

Current members will transition into the **Standard Club Membership** and enjoy added benefits. The transition to a tiered membership for existing members will begin in July as memberships come up for renewal.

For U.S. members, a portion of the IHRSA membership dues will go toward the public affairs and *National Health & Fitness Alliance's (NHFA)* efforts to support industry advocacy and public relations efforts. In contrast, international membership dues will contribute to the *Global Health & Fitness Alliance (GHFA)*. An investment in membership also means an investment in the IHRSA Foundation. IHRSA pledges to donate 1% of its total annual revenues to the foundation to promote health through exercise. To join IHRSA, go to ihrsa.org.

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Once we have this pandemic behind us, knock on wood, we'll be looking for markets around the country to really bring what we think is a very unique experience to active people across the country.

C.I. - Fantastic. We will look forward to reporting on that! When that future time comes, how are you guys planning to manage facilities at a distance? Will you split up your duties and each be on respective sites, rely on managers, etc.?

KA - We approach leadership as collaboratively as we possibly can while also creating universes of responsibility that allow the two of us to go deep in certain areas. We really approach these things tied at the hip. We talk regularly. We plan together thoroughly. We make the most important decisions together. The benefit of having the two of us is that you can take all the details and all the nuances of this vision and have it fully reside in two different people. And, you can get 99% similar outcomes with either of us approaching a question. That's a real advantage for our business.

CD - We have also built a really great team. Because we knew we wanted to build a large business, we made early investments into an executive team that would allow us to grow and scale our business very, very quickly. Part of that was hiring for some roles that we would not have if we

were only going to have one location in Springfield, Virginia. Because we are planning to grow and will need to manage multiple locations across the country, we made those investments. We have a very deep and sophisticated bench, including our COO, **Jeff Riney**, who's actually from the Chicago region. Because of the quality of our team and our confidence in the execution plan, we feel really good about our ability to operate Springfield, Chicago and beyond.

■ ■ ■

My sincere *Thanks and Appreciation* to **Craig Dixon** and **Kendrick Ashton** for their time interviewing for and reviewing this cover story. Thank you also to **Annie Johnson** for her assistance through our cover story process.

(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.)



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Legal Considerations for Mandating COVID-19 Vaccines in the Workplace

By: **Paul R. Bedard, Esquire**

Widespread vaccine availability is one of the drivers behind the reopening of the doors of the fitness industry. However, legal considerations arise when considering whether to mandate vaccines within the workplace. Although health clubs will have to determine whether they should require proof of vaccines from their customers and the legality of this within their jurisdiction, the following article will focus on the key considerations surrounding the mandating of employee COVID-19 vaccinations.

The *Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)* guides employers to address questions related to the COVID-19 vaccine. The EEOC's most recent guidance indicates that employers can mandate that employees be vaccinated as a condition of working on-site. However, the employer must undertake a fact-specific analysis to determine whether an exception to a vaccination policy is needed. The two key potential exceptions involve providing a reasonable accommodation due to a disability or due to a sincerely held religious practice or belief.

If an employee declines a vaccine for a claimed disability, the employer must employ a qualification standard to determine whether the employee is a direct threat to the health or safety of individuals within the workplace. An individualized assessment must be conducted by analyzing the nature of the risk, the nature and severity of potential harm, the likelihood the potential harm will occur and the imminence of the

potential harm. If the employer concludes that an employee cannot be vaccinated due to a disability, yet causes a direct threat to the worksite, the employer cannot take action to exclude the employee unless a reasonable accommodation cannot be provided that would reduce or eliminate the risk absent undue hardship.

When an employer is notified of an employee's sincerely held religious practice or belief, the employee must again provide a reasonable accommodation absent undue hardship. Undue hardship has been defined by courts as, "having more than a de minimis cost or burden on the employer." Due to the broad spectrum of religious beliefs and practices, EEOC guidance provides that an employer should "ordinarily assume" that an employee's request for a religious accommodation is based on a sincerely held religious belief. However, if an employer, "has an objective basis for questioning either the religious nature or the sincerity of a particular belief, practice or observance," the employer can request additional supporting information.

If an employer cannot exempt or provide a reasonable accommodation due to a disability or a sincerely held religious practice or belief, it would then be lawful for the employer to physically exclude the employee from the workplace. However, the employer should not automatically terminate the employee. Rather, the employer must first determine whether any other Federal, State or local laws apply that might impact the employee's rights before deciding whether to terminate the

employment relationship.

Further complicating matters here is the fact that the current vaccines have only *Emergency Use Authorization (EUA)*. For a vaccine that is being employed under an EUA, the *Food and Drug Administration (FDA)* has a duty to "[E]nsure that recipients of the vaccine under an EUA are informed, to the extent practicable under the applicable circumstances, that FDA has authorized the emergency use of the vaccine, of the known and potential benefits and risks, the extent to which such benefits and risks are unknown, that they have the option to accept or refuse the vaccine, and of any available alternatives to the product." This may give rise to an employment lawsuit should an employee allege a violation of the public policy in the EUA law. There are simply open questions here at the time of this writing.

On a practical level, employers will have to anticipate to what degree a mandatory vaccine policy will impact their workplace and their ability to retain talent. Many employers have decided to encourage and incentivize vaccinations rather than mandating that employees be vaccinated. Additionally, employers have implemented measures to address conditions that might otherwise pose a direct threat by an unvaccinated employee by increasing distances between employees and customers, improving ventilation, heightening cleaning protocols and allowing telecommuting. Where practical, these measures may make it difficult to conclude that an unvaccinated employee poses a direct threat.

This area of the law is complex and varied, and the many subtopics and related considerations are far too many to cover within this article. There will be many legal developments during the months and years ahead. Therefore, this brief article is intended for informational purposes only. It is not offered as legal



Paul R. Bedard, Esquire

advice. Please contact your attorney for specific direction to determine what is appropriate within your circumstances.

(Paul R. Bedard, Esquire has nearly twenty years of management, leadership and operations experience in the health and fitness industry. As a practicing attorney, Paul's health and fitness industry experience provides him with a unique perspective when advising health clubs regarding employee training, handbooks, policies, contracts, disputes or premises liability claims. When not practicing law or spending quality time with his wife and daughters, Paul strives to be active in his local community. Paul has served as the Assistant Town Attorney for the Town of Southington, Connecticut. He has also served on the Southington Zoning Board of Appeals and the Board of the Central Connecticut Regional Planning Agency. Paul is a solo practitioner at The Law Office of Paul Bedard, LLC, in Southington, Connecticut. Paul can be reached by email at AttorneyPaulBedard@gmail.com or phone at 860-414-0110.)



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Keeping Courts Busy For Fun and Fitness

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

This article brings *USA Racquetball's* and *US Handball's* collective efforts to brainstorm as many ways as possible that courts can be kept busy and profitable. These ideas are gathered loosely into categories, a veritable smorgasbord: pick and choose, start small or go with a full-course meal. The amount of effort and organization needed will be up to the approach taken by the club and the resources available, with the concept of keeping courts playable.

Low-Hanging Fruit

Work with your own members who would appreciate the court space, manage it themselves, advertise ideas and encourage court reservations:

- **Of course:** Racquetball, Handball, Paddleball;
- **Classes:** Zumba / Fitness / Yoga /

Martial Arts;

- **Personal Training:** Mats and Hand Weights);
- **One-on-one lessons or group practice sessions:** Soccer, Volleyball, Tennis, Badminton, Tai Kwon Do, Softball Drills (cross training), Dodge Ball, Spike Ball, SocCourt, International Court Soccer, Fencing.

Mid-Range Ideas

Might take a bit of organization and modest equipment investment by the club:

- Wallyball;
- Half-court basketball (hang a basket over the back wall from the gallery at the correct height);
- Corn hole (aka bags); how about a family tournament?
- Ping Pong (aka table tennis).

Full-Out Programming for Members/Guests

May require a paid or volunteer CPC (Court Programming Coordinator) to promote/manage:

- For larger facilities with on-site staff and programming: small/private exercise classes; clinics and classes; challenge courts, etc.
- Leagues/informal groups/clinics/camps for Racquetball, Handball, Paddleball, Wallyball, etc.
- Seasonal camps for junior and adult players; leverage local pros if available.
- Source of revenue for outside groups (see the lists above and turn your CPC loose on social media advertising and business calls). *Be cognizant of and manage liability issues.*

Thinking "Inside the Box"

Fun ideas way off the beaten path:

- Parties: birthday, graduation, retirement
- A rented bounce house for kids' parties will fit on a court!
- Rotate courts, have different challenges/activities on each: soft obstacle courses, cornhole, etc.
- Try sport-specific "Minute to Win It" challenges in each court (e.g., dropping

and hitting a handball/racquetball to hit a ball can on the floor against the front wall or prizes taped to the front wall; hitting ceiling shots that drop into a box in the left back corner; or just crazy challenges for kids who don't have anything to do with a sport.

■ Check out bit.ly/clubinsider129 for 14 games for racquetball courts.

Believing in the wisdom of helping clubs keep courts busy and profitable (a win-win for everyone!), we have collected a lot of information about a number of these activities. The info is easily found by online search, but if you want an easier route, contact **Mike Wedel** (Racquetball) or **Matt Krueger** (Handball) and we'll be happy to share (See the **Ad on This Page**).

Conclusion

"*Squickle Ball*"?? Inspiration so often comes from the ideas of others. Mr. John Archer inspired us with this creative approach (Pandemic Plan B), adapted by doubles squash players at *Club Atwater* in Montréal. Check out a video interview by **Pierre Obendrauf** of the *Montreal Gazette* by going to bit.ly/clubinsider130.

Give us your ideas, too, please. We volunteer to grow and nurture the database! Submit your ideas or Learn more at bit.ly/clubinsider124.

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Engagement: Building Your Club's Real Social Network

By: **Jeffrey Pinkerton**

Driving engagement. Growing followers. Encouraging comments. Gaining likes. If you have a presence on social media, your team has no doubt discussed these metrics. And, for the purpose of the platform, each of these is important to understand and track when measuring the effectiveness of your social media reach. But, is online engagement (now highly driven by a somewhat-mysterious, ever-changing, self-serving algorithm) giving us all a false sense of connection? Has the hot-topic conversation of "virtual" and video fitness clouded the core importance of personal connection, shared experiences and building your club's real social network?

Driving (genuine) engagement. Growing members. Encouraging interaction and conversation. Gaining likes (raving fans). The importance of building your club's culture of connection has never been more important. With mask mandates easing and capacity restrictions soon to follow, those clubs that excel at building a welcoming, inviting and engaging social experience will thrive as people look for ways to safely re-engage in life. In a world where most people are socially starved and screen-fatigued, health clubs have a unique opportunity to literally come to the rescue for people as a place to improve both their mental and physical health.

According to the *American Psychological Association's* recent report

Stress in America, the pandemic has increased stress levels with 75% of adults reporting a high stress level during the past year related to the pandemic. To make matters worse, people's level of physical activity has decreased, with more than half of U.S. adults (53%) reporting being less physically active than they wanted to be. Their recommendations? Staying active. Limiting screen-time. And, social connection.

Building a culture that places a high value on social connection and community takes strategic direction and organizational intent. It must be part of everything you do: the people you hire, the programming you offer, the events you host and the pathway you set members on when they join your facility. It should inform every choice you make in marketing and messaging, and ultimately, it should direct every choice you make when mapping out the member experience. Time spent improving the social strength of your business is an investment that will pay dividends as connection and interaction can have a huge impact on member satisfaction and member retention.

According to **Dr. Melvyn Hillsdon**, interactions with members can improve the likelihood they will return, can reduce cancellations and improve retention. So, as you look at your people and your processes, are you intentionally helping members get connected? Are you providing

(See **Jeffrey Pinkerton** Page 22)



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...Jeffrey Pinkerton

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opportunity for your team to engage and interact with members? Are you tipping the scales to build a social health club? How connected are your members? And, what percentage of your membership are you reaching? Is your culture one that encourages connection?

With four college-aged kids, my wife and I have visited and toured a fair number of college campuses. At one school in particular, before going on a tour of campus, we had the chance to sit down and hear from the *Dean of Admissions*. She told the story of the university's history and the influence of Presidents and key leaders through the years. As she described the history, she made special note to tell us about the long-standing "Speaking Tradition" of the university. It was a tradition instilled by one of the university's earliest Presidents, who was passionate about creating opportunity for conversation and

creating space and time for earnest debate and discourse. By tradition, she told us, as we walked around campus, we would likely be greeted by most professors and students that we passed. And, in fact, the "Speaking Tradition" encouraged students to choose conversation over isolation.

She went on to say, "We hope that, when you walk through campus, you see very few people with headphones on walking by themselves. And, instead, we hope you'll see students walking together in conversation. We hope that you see very few and maybe even NO ONE walking with their head down on their phone." She continued, "You see, the 'Speaking Tradition' encourages eye contact and an acknowledgment of people around you. In the dining hall, while not always perfect, we hope that you'll see very few people sitting by themselves, but instead you'll find groups of students eating together and in conversation. And, we hope you won't see a smartphone in sight."

The university places a high value

on creating a culture of connection. They encourage it, and they expect it. Even as big-tech continues to push our culture towards more isolation, more screen-time and the consumption of more online content (their business model is after all, all about time and attention), this university continues to place connection and conversation as the highest priority.

What does this mean for you? We hope it will encourage you to hold fast to your convictions about personal connection. We hope you will work even harder now to build a culture of connection at your facility, where very few members have on headphones working out alone, where you prioritize social-time over screen-time, and where you encourage your members, while not always perfect, to choose working out together over working out alone. After all, people can work out alone at home.

If you are interested in building a stronger culture of connection and increasing those members who choose working out together (group fitness) over



Jeffrey Pinkerton

working out alone (alone fitness), learn more about MOSSA at www.mossa.net.

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

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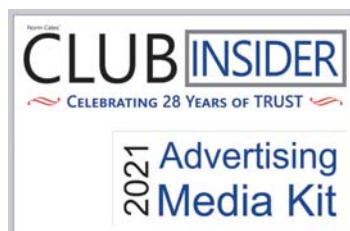
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