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NEWS

The Pulse of the Health, Racquet & Sports Club Business Worldwide

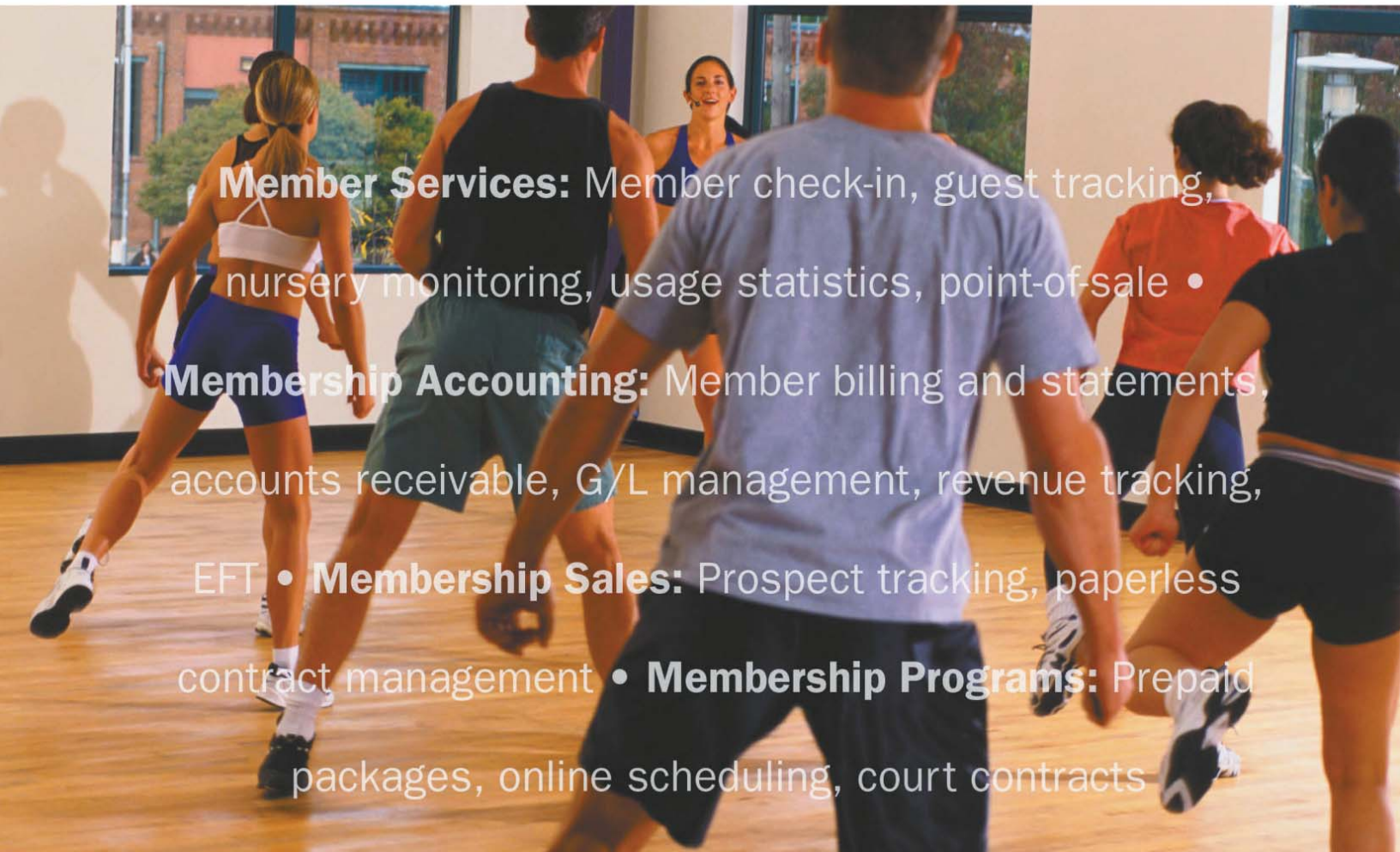
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(L to R) Josh Stratton, Jonathan Winstal, Lyle Schuler, Austin Benjamin, AnnChris Warren, Kristin Koegel & "Mac"

Lyle Schuler...
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Norm Cates'

THE Club Insider

NEWS

Lyle Schuler..

"Makes It Fun at the MAC!"

By Norm Cates, Jr.

When I think of Lyle Schuler, I think of FUN...and a BIG SMILE!

I write with a 'smile' in my heart when I write about this very unique and special guy, Lyle Schuler. Schuler has a contagious happiness and energy about him. His ability to pass happiness onto others is nothing short of special, unique and wonderful. In this in-depth case-study and cover-story, we will have an interview with Lyle Schuler. We will also hear about his "gift" from his former bosses, Sales Makers' Ray Gordon and Eddie Tock, as well as great comments from the key staff at his club, the MAC... the Mid-Hudson Valley Athletic Club.

To me, the smile he seems to always wear is his 'badge representing his great attitude and his power of positive thinking.' Nicknamed "Hammer", from his years as a star running back in football, Lyle Schuler is a man that has the "Enthusiasm" of industry icon Dale Dibble combined with the "Make It Fun" mentality of Sandy Coffman. Lyle Schuler has come a long way and his story is heart warming...

Old, Ugly, Worn-Out and Nasty 62,000 Square-Foot Club Dubbed... Ugliest In New York State!

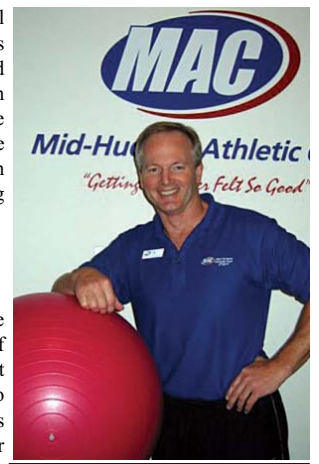
Any person would HAVE TO HAVE a great attitude and a very strong power of

positive thinking to return to his hometown to take on the very tough job of revival and refurbishment of an old, ugly, worn-out and nasty 62,000 square-foot health club! The club, located in Kingston, New York, was originally built in 1981 as a tennis center. It was converted into a big indoor skating rink and then reconverted into a health club. Before Schuler stepped up to the plate in early 2003 and invested close to \$1 million in refurbishment and transformation, this club was UGLY, UGLY, UGLY! And, NASTY! The club has had three different names over the past 24 years including: The Tiger Racquet Club, Tiger Gold's and finally, immediately before Schuler took over, Tiger's

Total Sports Complex. Sal Pellegrino, long-time fitness industry veteran, once described this club as "The ugliest club in the State of New York!" before Schuler took it on. What Lyle Schuler has achieved there in less than three years is nothing short of remarkable.

A Very Unique Background

Lyle Schuler is the only club owner that I know of anywhere in this industry that has split his amazing career into three successful parts: Part I as an employee and then a partner in a chain of clubs in New York and Connecticut; Part II as a nationwide club business consultant with Sales Makers for five years and Part III as a 3-



Lyle Shuler

year club owner and "Renaissance Leader" in the
(See Lyle Schuler page 6)

13 Years And Counting!

By Norm Cates, Jr.

You read it first right here! This issue completes our 12th year of publication! We thank God for the strength he has given us over these past 12 years. We ask God and you for help here today as we move on in our quest for continued publishing success.

We thank you all for reading CLUB INSIDER.

This CLUB INSIDER

publication was launched in November, 1993, with a used Apple Macintosh Computer I purchased for \$100. For 12 years, although I do have a great computer now, I've done all of the jobs of this CLUB INSIDER publishing business including: Publisher, Editor, Writer, Contributing Author coordinator, ad salesman, subscription salesman, advertising and subscription invoicing, all book-keeping, subscription data input

for mailing, monthly mailings and collections. I've enjoyed doing it all except for the Computer Layout and Information Technology work. Fortunately, that work has been well done for the first 8 years by Ms. Cathy Brown of Atlanta's Hudspeth Report and for the past 4 years by my son, Justin Cates (Justin has worked for CLUB INSIDER for 9 years now!). Thanks to Cathy and Justin for their great effort and

contributions, and thanks to my Dad, his wife Louise and my brother Dave for their support.

This little home-based business has been nothing short of a "labor of love". That is because it is all about you all, the people that I love in an industry I love. In short, I give you the best possible effort every day, week and month so that you do look forward to receiving your CLUB INSIDER.

While CLUB INSIDER has sometimes struggled financially during these 12 years, we've never wavered from "Our Purpose" and we've established a niche in this industry. That is to "Tell-It-Like-It-Is". Nobody else does this... it is a tough job, but somebody needed to do it! Or, the health club industry could have gone on and on with people or companies thinking it is just fine and
(See 13 Years page 6)

Inside The Insider

- A White Paper – Challenging Views Of The Health Club Industry
- Training Your Sales Team Year Round – Part I
- 10 Questions A Smart Club Operator Should Ask Every Month!

Fitness First Acquired by Funds Advised by BC Partners

Funds advised by BC Partners, a leading European private equity group, announced the acquisition of Fitness First for an enterprise value of GBP 835 million [1.2 billion euros] from Cinven, the European buy-out fund. Fitness First is the world's leading fitness company with more than 1.1 million

members served in 424 clubs across 15 countries worldwide. Fitness First is expected to generate revenues of more than GBP 400 million [590 million euros] and EBITDA of GBP 95 million [140 million euros] in the year to October, 2005. It is market leader in most of the markets in which it operates,

including the UK, Germany, Australia and a number of other European and Asian countries.

Fitness First provides a distinctive concept of "value-for-money" fitness clubs conveniently located in urban locations. This model operates successfully across all international
(See Fitness First page 29)

•Norm's Notes•

*These Notes contain lots of news and a few of my opinions.
 As we begin our 13th year of publication, I continue to welcome your opinions and views...*

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• **HELLO everybody!**
 This is your *friendly CLUB INSIDER Publisher Since 1993* checking in!

• **13 Years and Counting!** We've now completed our

Thank You

To The **Club Insider News 2005 Contributing Author Team** Listed Below:

• **Karen D. Woodard** - President - Premium Performance Training - (303) 417-0653

• **Michael Scott Scudder** - President - Southwest Club Services - (505) 690-5974

• **Casey Conrad** - Communications Consultants - (800) 725-6147

• **Rick Caro** - President, Management Vision, Inc - (212) 987-4300

• **Colin Milner** - V.P. Sales/Marketing - Founder & CEO International Council on Active Aging - (866) 335-9777

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• **Richard Ekstrom** - President - Retention Management - (800) 951-8048

• **Geoff Dyer** - President & CEO - Lifestyle Family Fitness - (717) 456-3100 Ext. 4076

• **Raymond Long** - Owner - Personal Best Fitness (386) 822-4764

• **Dale Dibble** - Retired - Bentley Village - Naples, Florida. Email: dwdibble@hotmail.com

• **John Brown** - President - PCM Fitness, Inc. - (281) 894-7909

• **Gary Polic** Communications Consultants - GPolic@communication-consultants.us - 866-825-8501

• **Will Phillips** - President - REX Executive Roundtables (858)515.7835)

12th year of publication! 12 years ago Red Lerille, former Mr. America, and now a 43-year club owner, appeared on our cover with one of his vintage restored aircraft. If you're new to CLUB INSIDER... let me tell you about our publication. CLUB INSIDER is about the wonderful people that make our great health club industry what it is today. And, this newspaper stands for a lot more... So, I cordially invite you to read my page #3 article entitled: *13 Years and Counting! Thank you all for reading CLUB INSIDER! Yes... Isn't it amazing how fast time flies when we're having FUN!*

• *Big news* in Europe

with the sale of *Fitness First*, the 15-country, 424-club chain for *\$1.5 billion*. Quite an accomplishment for former CLUB INSIDER cover guys, **MIKE BALFOUR**, **MIKE METCALF**, **JIM McGOLD-RICK** and the man from *Down Under*, **TONY deLEEDE**.

• *Body Training Systems' CEO*, **RICH BOGGS**, informs me that **MIKE CAMPATELLI** has joined BTS as its *National Sales Manager* and will serve as a *BTS National Instructor*. *Congrats Mike!* Additionally, Boggs mentioned that all is going really well for BTS; **JOHN MILLER** and the *Courthouse Athletic Club* chain in Salem, Oregon as well as



Justin (L) and Norm Cates, Jr.

MIKE ARTEAGA and his two *All Sports Clubs* in the Hudson Valley of upstate New York have signed on. Additionally, BTS now has *weekly webcasts* on *Thursdays at 3 p.m. Eastern Time*. To access the *BTS webcasts*, just call 1.800.729.7837 to obtain the *webcast login information*.

• *Don't miss the 20th Annual CLUB INDUSTRY Conference and Trade Show in Chicago Nov. 2-5th. Please stop by to see me at my Exhibit #118. Please visit and do business with our great advertisers at the Exhibit #'s to the left. For info and registration go to: www.clubindustryshow.com*

• *Congratulations to one of my favorite couples in this wonderful industry, RUDY and VIRGINIA SMITH, who celebrated their 50th Wedding Anniversary and their 80th Birthdays together with a wonderful gathering of friends in Las Vegas on October 8th.* Rudy is the Founder of the amazing *Las Vegas Athletic Clubs* and has been honored by the *NFTJ* with its *Lifetime Achievement Award* and by *IHRSA* with its *DALE DIBBLE Distinguished Service Award*. **GINNY FITZGERALD**, daughter of Rudy and Virginia, and wife of **BRETT FITZGERALD**, produced an amazing invitation for the event. I really wanted to be there for the FUN... But, guess what? I

was on deadline right here in Atlanta, Georgia, getting this issue ready to go out to all of you. I have *love in my heart* for Rudy and Virginia Smith. They are *two of the nicest people* I've had the pleasure of meeting in my career, and I wish them both well!

• Here is something that *freaks me out!* If you have followed the background of **BRIAN HOMAN** in the Fort Lauderdale suburb of Coral Springs, it will freak you out too! If you have not, here is a quick review of the *Homan case*. Approximately 5 years ago, Brian Homan had a company in the club industry called *Tools Management, Inc.* Tools Management, Inc. collected EFT dues from checking accounts and credit cards for clubs. *Homan's company went bust. He blamed it all on a computer programmer. The company survived for a few years, but before the company busted, at least \$200,000 in membership dues collected from members for 8 clubs across the U.S. was never given to those clubs by Homan's company.* The amounts lost by those clubs to Homan's Tools Management, Inc. ranged from *\$70,000* from a club in Texas, to *\$45,000* from a club in Southern California, to *\$20,000* from a club in Delaware, and *my list goes on. The money has never been* (See Norm's Notes page 7)

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13 Years and Counting!

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...Lyle Schuler

continued from page 3

MAC - the Mid-Hudson Valley Athletic Club.

Schuler has now changed the MAC into a real 'gem' in upstate New York, voted in 2004 as the best club in the Hudson Valley, and he is still continuing with his expansion and improvements as he has just acquired an additional 12,000 square-feet to expand the product line of the club even more

(See "New Horizons" herein). In my opinion, had Lyle Schuler's career not taken this 3-part path, he would not have been so very well prepared for the success he is now experiencing with his MAC Team in Kingston, New York. So, Schuler owes a huge THANKS to his Part I original bosses, Bill Austin, Herb Redl, and Mike Arteaga and his Part II bosses, Ray Gordon, Founder and Eddie Tock of the terrific Sales Makers Company (See their

remarkable track record ad on page #7). Now, in Part III, the MAC is rolling in Kingston, New York! In less than three years, Schuler has taken the old monstrosity, known as Tiger's Total Sports Complex, from *less than 600* memberships to *2,100* memberships! Read on!

A Star Football Player Preparing For Life

Lyle Schuler was born in Long Island, New York. At age 11, his Dad moved Lyle and his brother Wayne to Kingston in upstate New York. There, he grew up and graduated from Kingston High School. He was a star football player and a wrestler. His football career began in junior high school. Schuler recalls, "In 7th grade I was the fastest kid in the school, so I guess Coach just said, 'Give him the ball.'" Indeed... 'give him the ball.' Schuler scored 128 points in seven games as a 13-year old, 7th grade player (An average of 3 TD's per game). He went on to become an excellent running back at Kingston High School and made the All County Team. He was honored his Senior year with the Michael Hoffman Memorial Scholarship for being the outstanding Student Athlete of his graduating class.

Graduating from Kingston High in 1974, he went to Cortland State University, where his football skills from high school advanced. Schuler recalled, "Some ballplayers peak early, I was one of those players who was able to step up my game at the college level. However, my first two football seasons at Cortland were punctuated by two different injuries: a bad hip pointer my freshman year and torn knee ligaments my sophomore year. But, in my junior year, I managed to stay healthy and was able to set the Cortland State University school records in both rushing yards and points scored. The 15 touchdowns I had that year ranked 2nd in the nation in scoring in Division III football. I also set a school rushing record with just under 900 yards in a 9-game season. During my junior year, I was contacted by some pro scouts from the Dallas Cowboys and the Pittsburgh Steelers. That was encouraging; unfortunately, I suffered a separated shoulder at the beginning of my senior season and missed the first four games, and with



(L to R) MAC Teammates – Kristin Koegel, Holly Snow & Kalen Marino At Luau Party

that injury, I missed any second looks I would have had from the pro scouts. The thought of 'red shirting' the season and gaining another year of eligibility entered my mind, but as one of the Co-Captains of the team, that wasn't an option. Wearing a 'make-shift' shoulder brace while recovering from the shoulder injury, I played in just five games, rushed for about 500 yards, and as a team, we finished the season with only two wins. It was a long season. As it turned out, all those hours spent in the athletic training room would prove extremely helpful in the future when dealing with members and their exercise rehabilitation programs."

Schuler was honored with the Cortland State Alumni Association Scholarship and a Kappa Delta Scholarship his Senior year. In 1979, he graduated from Cortland State cum laude with a degree in Recreation Education. Schuler commented about his football playing years, "It was a great experience to be involved in a sport I loved, get to play with some guys who would become friends for life and every Saturday get a chance to work your heart out in a good cause. I remember feeling that if I wasn't beat-up or exhausted on Sunday after a game, then I hadn't played hard enough. Some of the recognition I received was just a bonus. I think sports can condition you for success in life. It conditions you to the disci-

pline of practice, hard work and developing a plan and a strategy to win. Becoming involved in the club industry seemed a natural, and as a former athlete, really 'clicked-in' with me on the tie-in between sports teams and business. Winning in business is not unlike winning in any sports organization. It takes on many of the same characteristics: good coaching, a good game plan, discipline, consistency, commitment, and a burning desire to win doesn't hurt either, but as in life, we can't win every game, and we won't win every challenge we face, so we learn to accept both results while never allowing our attitude to quit on us. It's our own attitude that we must safeguard so preciously; it will be the difference maker every time. Whether you think you can or you think you can't - in either event you're right."

The MAC Team Weighs In On The 'Boss!'

Reaching out to Lyle Schuler's MAC Team for their responses to the following three questions, it becomes obvious why Schuler is such a success.

We asked:

1. How long have you been with the MAC, and what is it like working with Lyle Schuler?

2. What do you value the most in your work?

3. What is the most
(See Lyle Schuler page 10)

...13 Years

continued from page 3

dandy to do bad things to their customers or competitors without giving a second thought. During the last 12 years, the health, racquet and sports club industry has continued to grow, mature and become more professional. We hope we've contributed positively to that progress for you whatever your involvement in the industry is.

My heartfelt thanks and appreciation goes to all of our great advertisers during the past 12 years. Two of our advertisers, Affiliated Acceptance Corporation (page #9) and the Springfield Corporation (page #8) have had their ads published in every edition since we began offering advertising (That is 11 years and 5 months as we did not offer advertising for the first 7 months). We have many other advertisers who have been with us six or more years. We are very proud to carry the message of these excellent and professional companies each month. We hope you have and will continue to support them.

Then, there are our wonderful Contributing Authors. What a great group this is! Check out our Contributing Author list on page #4. All I can say to each of you good friends is THANKS for your hard work, dedication and effort on behalf of this industry and the CLUB INSIDER cause.

I want to thank all the excellent and hard working people at Walton Press for their dedication to the delivery of excellence for us every month for these 12 years. Walton Press is simply the best company that I have ever had the pleasure of doing business with in my life. I am not sure how I got so lucky. Had it not

been for Walton Press, I am not sure we would have made it this far. Thanks to my friend and Walton Press Rep, Linda McGinnis, all the great Team in the pre-press department, the pressmen, the mailing department, the drivers, the bookkeeping department, the top management and the owners. I urge you to contact Walton Press for any of your club publication production needs: www.waltonpress.com. Walton Press has been in business since 1900! That's 105 years, so you know they've got to be great!

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So, as we sail into our 13th year with great excitement, renewed vigor and dogged determination to continue to "Tell-It-Like-Is", we bid you farewell with one final...

THANK YOU!

(Norm Cates, Jr. is the Founder, Publisher and owner of CLUB INSIDER and 31-year veteran of the health, racquet and sportsclub industry. Cates was the 1st President of IHRSA and a Co-founder of the Association in 1981. In March, 2001, Cates was honored by IHRSA with its DALE DIBBLE Distinguished Service Award. Cates may be reached at: clubinsidernews@mindspring.com or by phone at: 770.850.8506)



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...Norm's Notes

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Magazine, a new publication produced by IHRSA for members of IHRSA clubs, was launched in September. Get Active Magazine follows about one year after the launch of *Club Life Magazine*, also a publication produced and targeted to club members. I support BOTH of these publications and I think you should, too (Check the note below about our CLUB INSIDER for consumers work in progress!).

3. IHRSA's Search Committee Chairman, **GREG LAPPIN** and Co-Chair, **JULIE MAIN**, are working hard with the committee and the folks at the *Korn/Ferry Executive Search firm* to find the best qualified and prepared person to step in for IHRSA's 25-year and highly esteemed Executive Director, **BIG JOHN McCARTHY**. Notice, I wrote "step in" above and did not write "replace"...because John McCarthy cannot and will not be "replaced". I will support and assist in any way I possibly

can, the Board's choice for the new person, whom by the way, will be referred to as the **IHRSA President/CEO**.

• Speaking of IHRSA's brand new *Get Active Magazine*, don't forget that someday joining that competition will be "**CLUB INSIDER for consumers**"...our new publication targeted to serve Consumers of America a/k/a your members! Since a major driver of that publication, my son **JUSTIN CATES**, is still matriculating as a Junior at the *University of Georgia*, I am just going to sit back for a while and see how *Get Active Magazine* and *Club Life Magazine* do as they move along. In the mean time, if you'd like to discuss how CLUB INSIDER for consumers will be made available to your members, advertising opportunities, or writing opportunities for the new "**CLUB INSIDER for consumers**", just contact me directly at: clubinsidernews@mindspring.com or by calling: 770.850.8506.

• **LATE BREAKING NEWS!** I am as excited as a Dad could be! My son,

JUSTIN CATES, also our **CLUB INSIDER IT Director and Assistant Editor**, just called to inform me of some great news! He received today his *Letter of Notification of Acceptance* to the *Terry College of Business at the University of Georgia!* Boy-oh-boy... What wonderful news! The Terry College of Business accepts into its Management School about 300 students per year out of 32,000 University of Georgia students!

• **MARIO BRAVOMALO**, Founder and **DARON ALLEN**, President, were recently honored by the *Dallas Business Journal* with its **Innovator Award**. Congrats guys. Also, Bravomalo and Allen have announced that they have relocated their *Visual Fitness Planner™ (VFPTM) Company* to new corporate headquarters at 1600 Green Oaks Road, Fort Worth, TX. Best wishes to the VFP Team as they now serve 400 clubs! (See the *Visual Fitness Planner ad on page #11*).

• Welcome aboard to two more new advertisers and

welcome back **JEFFREY RANDALL** of *JLR Associates!* Welcome to **Premier Partners**, the exclusive worldwide distributors of a patented, clinically proven technology named **BioTrainer™**. This product brings NASA-grade technology to clubs in this new consumer product that I think will become a fast selling item to your members in health clubs across the country. (You make the profits!) Check out the **BioTrainer ad on page #23**. On page #25, we welcome new advertiser, **VoiceScapes**, a Reston, VA.-based company that can provide your club with an excellent telephone management system.

• **RON BUDDO** and **SHERRY ROBB** are principals of our new advertiser, **MarketMyClub.com**. My apologies for erroneously stating Ron's name as Robb last month!

• Congratulations to **DEAN, M.J.** and **MELISSA KACHEL** as they have celebrated their 26th year of business in their *Quadrangle Athletic Club* in Coral Springs, Florida!

• There are a lot of people in need in the Gulf

States of the U.S. and around the world. But, let me just say, congratulations to all of you who have stepped up to raise money and/or contribute in other ways to help our fellow Americans. Amongst that group are some leaders in our club industry around the country, who have raised money and contributed to Hurricane Katrina victims: **IHRSA - \$5,000**, The LA-based *Spectrum Athletic Clubs - \$20,000*, the Chicago-based *X-Sport Clubs - \$14,000*, and the *Atlantic Club in New Jersey - \$30,000*, with all of it targeted to the *American Red Cross*. Additionally, **BRIAN EVANS** of *American Family Fitness*, in Richmond, VA, has announced that they will match Katrina relief funds raised through their membership up to \$20,000.

• **STEVE GILMOUR'S** Northern California-based, **LEISURE Sports, Inc.**, has announced a partnership with *Marriott International* to build 15 *Renaissance ClubSports* locations over the (See Norm's Notes page 28)

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...Lyle Schuler

continued from page 6

important thing you think a club should do for its members?

Here is how the MAC Team responded to the 3 questions above:

Deborah Zibella
 Office Manager and
 Co-Club Manager

A1 - I have worked at MAC for three years now. Working for Lyle Schuler has been a *life enriching experience*. He has the ability to mentor and give direction while making you, as an individual, feel completely empowered and motivated to do your best.

A2 - Working in a healthy, fun, group environment where each and every individual does his best to make the business great!! Many companies want their business to be a success, but the successful companies know that it is the people driving the business that make it that way. I believe that's what we have at MAC!

A3 - I think the most important thing that we can do for the members is **listen to them**. Most members will tell you what it is they are looking for in a club. If you take the time to survey what your members want and need, you will be able to create a club that is going to be successful!

Jack Slockbower
 PT Staff Education Director,
 Group Fitness Coordinator



MAC Men's Locker Room After "The Renaissance"

and Nutrition Manager.

A1 - I've been teaching aerobics for three years at MAC and have been a full-time Personal Trainer and Nutritionist for two years and two months. Working for Lyle is like a dream come true out of Steven Covey's book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People*. He is a *WIN-WIN boss*. He's demanding, but what he demands is that *we constantly improve ourselves*. When you do something wrong, it isn't about getting punished or blamed, it's about what we are going to do so this doesn't happen again and so everyone involved learns from the mistake. He's all about creating something valuable from adverse situations. After 25 years of working for self-absorbed, emotional midgets in the theatre and the restaurant business, you've gotta love a boss like this!

A2 - I value the part of this job that forces me to become a larger person on the 'inside in' to deal with and stay involved with my existing clients and embrace a never ending flow of new people. This environment demands that. The staff here is a big part of making that possible. Under it all, we have a great time together and share a lot of laughs in a very professional environment. This keeps the daily burnout to a minimum.

A3 - A club should make its members feel comfortable and 'listened to' so they feel this is their private sanctuary; a safe place they can escape

to. It should make the difficult and painful process of self-transformation enjoyable and FUN!!! I know that happens here at MAC. You can see it in the faces of our members.

Austin Benjamin
 Director of Personal Training

A1 - I have been working with Lyle from the first week he opened the MAC almost three years ago. Lyle has been the most open-minded boss, not only to his staff, but for members as well. Lyle has made this gym like a big family that welcomes everyone with open arms. I couldn't see myself working for anyone else.

A2 - What I value most from my work is seeing the satisfaction on members' faces when they have reached their goals: seeing a quadriplegic totally make a life change, when once he could hardly move his arms to transfer himself in and out of his wheelchair to his bed and seeing people lose 50-100 pounds and go from deep depression to happy Mothers and wives. I mean the list of success stories goes on and on!

A3 - The most important thing you must do for your members is to keep 'wowing' them with new innovations and by always being willing to try to give them something new. It could be anything from seminars taught by trainers to the latest in equipment and education to help them reach their fitness goals. We remember these things can't be useful without a welcoming and helpful staff.

Josh Stratton
 Membership Director and
 Co-Club Manager

A1 - I've been with MAC for almost three years. Throughout that time, I've learned so much about the industry from Lyle and the experiences and opportunities that he has provided to me.

A2 - I love to hear member success stories and how they attribute them to their MAC membership. I get inspired by what we do each day. The great thing for us is that we are doing what we enjoy! It is very satisfying to see members who are getting results and feeling great when they're exercising!

A3 - I believe the most important thing our club can do for its members is to make it



MAC Men's Locker Room Before The Renaissance

count when the opportunity arises to show that we care about them. Listening to and acknowledging a club member can go a long way when they have an issue to be dealt with, club related or otherwise.

Kristin Koegel
 Customer Service Manager

A1 - In February 2004, I started working out at Mid-Hudson Athletic Club. After working out here for a few months, I was so impressed with the working environment Lyle had created here for his employees that I applied for a job. I have been working here at MAC since June 6th 2004. I have been the Customer Service Manager since February 1st, 2005. Working with Lyle has been a great learning experience for me. He is very knowledgeable in the health club industry and has taught me a lot. He is very kind and patient with his employees and is always willing to help in any way he can. Lyle also makes working here fun, which is why he has a staff that loves working for him.

A2 - The thing I value most about my work is helping people. In the health club industry, we really make a difference in people's lives. It is very rewarding to watch someone change his or her life for the better. It is wonderful to know that you had a part in helping that person make that life change. Just the other day, I had a member tell me that one of the reasons he comes to MAC is because I always greet him with

a smile and that helps brighten his day.

A3 - I believe the most important thing a health club can do for its members is keep them happy through good customer service. Good customer service is everything from providing good classes, personal training opportunities, a friendly hello when they come in, saying goodbye as they leave, always having a smile on your face, remembering members' names, remembering what shake or drink they like and just trying to help them achieve their goals anyway possible. I feel that under Lyle's guidance, the staff here at MAC really does a good job at keeping up great customer service for our members.

An Interview With One Nice Guy... Lyle Schuler

If you are looking for a "magic potion" that creates great club success, no matter where your club is or what it is like, we have some ingredients for you here in Lyle Schuler's interview comments:

Q. I asked Lyle Schuler, "This question is very special, Lyle. Please tell our readers what is in your heart because you've got one of the biggest hearts in our industry."

A. When you talk about what's in my heart right now Norm, what comes to my mind is the recent loss of a really good friend, Tom Ficarelli (FIC). FIC was in *LOVE* with this business! Even though he was an employee (See *Lyle Schuler page 12*)

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...Lyle Shuler

continued from page 10

ee of New York State for over 30 years, there is nothing more that he wanted to do than to retire from his job with the State, so he would have an opportunity to be in this business.

When you ask that question, one of the things I reflect on was my relationship with Tom. In all these years, there was nothing more that Tom wanted to do but just be a part of what we all do for a living. Losing Tom reminds me of how *lucky* we all are that we get a chance to impact so many people in a positive way... to really help people change their lifestyle and help them live fuller and richer lives. I met Tom Ficarelli at an IHRSA Conference about 15 years ago. Within five minutes of meeting Tom, I knew I was his friend and he was my friend. You very rarely experience that. Within half an hour, I was saying to myself that this guy is going to be a friend for life. For over 15 years, while still employed by New York State, Tom used his personal vacation time and dedicated himself to coming to IHRSA and Club Industry Conferences every year. He came to prepare himself for the day when he would retire as a New York State employee and become involved in this business full-time.

Even though Tom may have been cheated by passing away during his first year of retirement while preparing to open the big club he helped develop in Ithaca, his hometown, it reminds me how lucky we all are to be doing what we're doing. It reminds me of

how much we can make a difference in the quality of people's lives. We're in the business of helping people feel better about themselves. When you can do that with somebody, you can make a difference in how they live their life. That's what we do through exercise, diet/nutrition and motivation. People are so much better off in so many aspects of their lives after they've been consistent to a weekly routine. Trying to innovate and develop different methods to reach more members in an "effective way" is a key for me. That is a primary challenge to our business which leads back to our non-stop effort to enhance the member's club experience. We don't want to just sell them a membership, we want to reach them, and if we're successful in providing them an environment where there is support, motivation, the right programs, the right energy and the right atmosphere, we'll increase our chances. As an industry, we're giving millions of people hope and a better life every day as a result of our collective efforts. Members are living happier, healthier and more productive lives; that's an awesome movement to be a part of. Thinking about Tom Ficarelli's recent passing helps me realize what a special industry we're really in. We should all miss him and the desire he had to do what we all do.

Q. When, where and how did you first become involved in the health club industry?

A. After I had graduated from Cortland State, I had gone into substitute teaching while looking for a full-time job. One day I was driving by a health club in Poughkeepsie, New York called All Sport (Author note: Industry leader and 30-veteran, Mike Arteaga, owns the All Sport Club). I walked in and introduced myself. I explained that I had a degree from Cortland State. I met a manager, Nick Russomano, who would eventually become a very close friend of mine. It turned out that Nick was also a Cortland State graduate, so we hit it off instantly. He offered me a job literally on the spot as a trainer, and I went to work right away. I worked at All Sport for five years and got involved in fitness training, membership sales and management.

Schuler then became partners with Bill Austin and

Mary Murphy for a period of 14 years and they acquired a club in Danbury, CT. called the Players Club. In the mid 1980's, their partnership went into what Schuler describes as "an acquisition mode", and from 1985 to 1989, they acquired one club a year for four years in a row. A few years later, they acquired a fifth club. Schuler recalls, "Basically, we were a club turn-around company in the first few years. I became designated as the 'point-man' and would be responsible for many of the initial personnel and club changes which were necessary. Those responsibilities would also become similar to the work I would do later on as a consultant with Sales Makers and now presently here, as an owner of the MAC.

I would identify weak areas that needed to be brought up to par and then put together the plans necessary to improve those areas. We earned some recognition as the five clubs were listed in Club Industry Magazine's "Top 100" list of clubs for four consecutive years. We sold three clubs to Town Sports International in January, 1998 and I thought it might be a good time to change gears a bit."

**Sales Makers System
Helps A Lot!**

Q. At what point during your career did you become involved in working with Sales Makers?

A. Sales Makers had worked with us at several different points during our lifecycle of club operations. In 1989, we changed our club names from Players to Gold's Gyms. Beginning with our 2nd club, Sales Makers was instrumental as a consulting company in helping us launch the Grand Opening of our club in Newburgh, N.Y. During the years when we were acquiring our five clubs, we invited Sales Makers to return on several different occasions to re-evaluate what we were doing, check our systems, provide additional training and look for additional areas to maximize our revenues. We did this because, as you know, it's a 'plate spinning business!' For a small company like ours, having the focus of a knowledgeable unbiased expert looking over our shoulder justified the investment every time. Sometimes, as club owners, we get too close to our own prob-



MAC Kickboxing Studio

lems and our priorities can become shuffled. The right consulting advice can be critical to making the necessary correction before more serious issues develop. **Often club owner egos get in the way of investing in outside consultants. That can be a costly mistake. Most of the really good club operators recognize that consultants have a role even when things are going really, really well. That role is to keep things going really, really well.** Sales Makers were very helpful to us, and it was the right relationship to keep us on track with what we needed to do. That's how my own business and personal relationship began with the Sales Makers Company. After the TSI sale, I decided that I wanted to take a break from day-to-day operations for a while. That's when Ray Gordon, Founder of Sales Makers, approached me to find out if I would have any interest in working with the company. That was early 1998.

Q. How long Lyle did you work full-time with Sales Makers?

A. I worked with Ray and Eddie of Sales Makers for five years, from 1998 through 2002. It was a great experience. They are a great bunch of guys. They do it the right way. Everything Sales Makers does is ethical, based on helping a club owner maximize his revenues without selling just price or compromising club services.

Q. During your five years of working full-time with Sales Makers, "What needed fixing"

the most in clubs, generally speaking? What are other common issues you've witnessed as a consultant?

A. The wrong people in key positions and the lack of effective sales management. That's where the attention usually must fall first. To be successful, a club must start with the right people first and then provide the necessary tools, systems, training, resources, etc to help it all come together. Naturally, as a sales and marketing company, Sales Makers' primary objectives are to evaluate the selling process. Usually, you can impact the bottom line quickly by improving what goes on with the guest and membership staff relationship. First order of business, install the Sales Makers System, and then we make sure they are following the right procedures. Typically, the sales area just doesn't get enough attention, and a lot of times, if it is getting attention, it's the wrong kind of attention. So, my job at Sales Makers was to look at the process from A to Z; from phone inquiries, to how calls are transferred from the desk to sales staff to meeting and greeting prospects at the reception desk to the compensation of the membership team and so on... Usually, there is something that needs to be adjusted with the overall set-up. It may be the rates, the presentation, the schedule, the goals or the personality or skill level of the staff involved. It may be the wrong marketing or lack of marketing, an improperly arranged work
(See Lyle Shuler page 14)



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...Lyle Shuler

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space or any combination of a multiple of different items.

Usually in the sales area there are at least a dozen elements that we can identify that need to be tuned up or changed to make sure the club is hitting on all sales cylinders. So, when I referred earlier to the 'spinning plates', sometimes we would see some of these elements, 'busted and or just lying on the ground' so to speak: Something as simple as a follow-up procedure. What's the follow-up procedure that's in place? Is there anything in place for membership retention and customer service after the sale? Then, ongoing training. In many cases, ongoing training is one of the first things to fall off the table for a lot of clubs. Once a person has been trained in the Sales Makers System, continued training by the manager is

required for ongoing success. A lot of club owners have this 'vaccination mentality' and approach to ongoing sales staff training'. Their mistake is they say, 'There, I gave you the training to get started. Now, you're all set, now you know your job... get out there and do it.' *It just doesn't work that way! There needs to be continuous learning and continuous training available for ongoing education because so much of what is learned is forgotten if not practiced on a regular basis. And, since the club's income does depend on the proper club membership presentation from A to Z to a great extent, that's where we place our primary focus. Our secondary focus is to be sure the club is doing the right things related to club operations. Is there attention to member service? Are the Personal Trainers on the right page? Is the club kept up in areas such as cleanliness, mem-*

ber programming and child care?

The experience of working for five years with Sales Makers was a wonderful experience for me. It allowed me to step away from that day-to-day club owner/operator role for a while. It was gratifying and helpful for me to experience another perspective on all of the different challenges that do exist in the club industry and the challenges that we face in attempting to always run our clubs in an optimal way. It was good to be able to step aside for a while from the weekly payroll, the receivables, daily club openings and closings, do we have the whirlpool at the right temperature types of things, etc. Maybe the only difference was that I worried about someone else's club... Working with Sales Makers allowed me to gain a different perspective on club issues and operate with a laser beam focus on the areas in need of primary attention. It was very rewarding to know I could be the difference maker and a big upside was when a club owner or director would give me the WOW feedback followed by, 'when can I get you back in the club?' I really enjoyed *making a difference* for club owners... maybe making his or her job a little easier, maybe getting their numbers up and or really giving them some ideas to allow them to run their club business smoother. It was very fulfilling to be able to help club owners in a meaningful way, and I got excited about a lot of the clients I worked with. During the five years I worked with Sales Makers I was in 30 different states, and I consulted or presented workshops with 55-60 different clubs. I've worked with clients whose clubs have ranged in size from 5,000 square-feet up to 250,000 square-feet. For me, it was still fun, although at times, situations could be stressful, especially the road warrior experiences and sprints to make those connecting flight times. Presenting workshops and speaking at Industry Conferences provided an ongoing lesson in 'sharpening the saw' a la Steven Covey. After being out of the daily club operations for five years, I started to develop the desire to validate my consulting work by operating my own club again. That nagging thought provided the initiative to tackle the turnaround project which now is the MAC.

Lyle Schuler retains a close friendship with Sales Makers Ray Gordon and Eddie Tock. Here is what they had to say about the "Hammer", Lyle Schuler:

Sales Makers Ray Gordon and Eddie Tock Share Thoughts on Lyle Schuler

Ray Gordon, 30+ year club industry veteran comments: "Lyle Schuler; 'Excellence'. What else can you say??? It is what you come to expect. Lyle has always embraced the positive values of the industry. I first met Lyle at the All Sport Club in Poughkeepsie N.Y. in the early 80's. The high level of enthusiasm and motivation that he constantly maintained in the club then has stayed with him in every new phase of the industry that he undertook. That included Fitness Manager, Sales Manager, Club Manager, Club Owner, Multi-Club Owner, Consultant, requested Speaker, and Club Owner again. It was during the time that Lyle worked with Sales Makers that I really began to appreciate that he brings a powerful combination of integrity, enthusiasm, hard work and curiosity every time he enters the club. He is always wanting to learn something new to make things go a little bit better, faster and smoother. He is a regular attendee of industry shows where everyone seems to know him. I am not surprised at the success Lyle is achieving. I know his club certainly has that "Schuler Aura" that members really appreciate. 'Excellence'..."

Eddie Tock, 22+ year Sales Makers partner adds, "For over 22 years, Lyle has been a client, a co-worker and, most importantly, a close friend. If you had only one word to describe him, it would be "enthusiasm"! Lyle has always put his heart and soul into everything he does, whether it was working in the club as an owner, a leader, speaking at Club Industry or IHRSA, working with clients for five years as a consultant for Sales Makers or organizing (and participating in) a sand volleyball game or tug of war for the club. He is *passionate* about everything he does and has always managed to perform at a level of excellence. He has always been the driving force and the cheerleader behind

the success of all of the clubs he has owned or co-owned. He has always been an inspiration to many of his staff. I consider myself fortunate to have had him as a friend (he was also my best man when I got married), a client, and a co-worker in Sales Makers before he left to purchase his current club."

Schuler on 'Expectations' and Finding Staff That Care and Are Committed to Doing Their Best

Schuler - "Before we move on to the next question, I want to comment on one other common club industry issue. It's about expectations. When you get to visit and work with a lot of clubs as I have done, you meet an occasional club owner or manager that may have 'out of the ball park' and completely unrealistic expectations about the level of service possible. For these individuals, no one on the staff can ever do enough. Their intentions for high standards are valid but their methods are not. *The fear motivator tactics* often employed regarding job security just doesn't create the right environment that we must cultivate for the creation of winning teams. But, more often than that, many operators compromise their own performance standards and settle for far too little in the area of staff expectations. It is critical that our management teams constantly recheck the standards set and make a determination if job performance and attitude fits with the goals and culture of the club. *With few exceptions, there are always at least two or three employees in your club who should not be there. They are not contributors. They do not possess positive attitudes. They are not looking out for the benefit of your members (Or you). They are there for their own reasons and your club objectives are of no concern to them. Many times it's uncomfortable to address, but damage control is necessary.* And, it is essential that everyone's eyes remain open to who is helping and who is hurting. That's one of the gut check questions. *Does this staff member help or hurt our reputation as a high quality club and organization?* Next question on each staff member... *Would I mind if they worked for my competitor?* Next question... Is this individual committed to doing
 (See Lyle Shuler page 16)

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...Lyle Shuler

continued from page 14

his best? Next question... *Does this employee or manager really care about the club and its members, or is it just about the paycheck?* These questions help form a simple but effective process for your management of staff expectations and helps create a performance standard. This should be an ongoing process where the right team members are kept on the bus. *"Bad Attitudes" have no place* in our business... they are far more destructive than most of us realize.

The club management team should assume the majority of responsibility for the passengers on their bus, and of course, the right leadership is essential to any successful business. Redefining what your standard is and sharing your vision of responsibility to the membership is also part of the leader's role. We have to provide the right leadership for the club to be able to excel. It invariably comes back to that. There must be a balance where we set achievable expectations, and at the same time, recognize where compromise is valid. I think our greatest challenge and obligation to our members is to *surround ourselves with staff that care about the club and that are committed to doing their best. Without trying to oversimplify it... I recognize it's much easier said than done.*"

Schuler on the History of His Club

Q. Tell us a little history about your club before you became involved?

A. The club has been here for 24 years. Kingston, New York for-

merly was a big IBM employee location. But, in the early to mid 1990's, IBM laid off over 7,000 employees in the Kingston area, and that added tremendously to the problems of the club. When you take 7 or 8,000 white collar jobs out of this small market (25 to 30,000), it really hits the area hard. Essentially, the long-time club owner gave up on the club when IBM left. There had not been another dollar invested in the club since the mid-nineties. It really had gone down hill, and that's where I saw one of the major challenges. The owner felt the market had deserted him, and from that moment, it appears he must have operated exclusively by expense management which only creates another set of problems. To think you can succeed by just focusing on the expense side without reinvesting in and maintaining your club is just poor business. To think: 'I'm gonna really scale down, I'm not going to reinvest, I'm not going to make the club nicer, I will drop my rates, I will offer less, I'm going to cut back on my cleaning services, my personnel and staffing, I'm not going to buy any new equipment and really run it bare bones... this appears to have been the prior mindset and operating philosophy for the better part of ten years or more! **It left the club in a state of disrepair and outdated in every aspect of the facility.**

Club Revival 101 "How To Revive and Turn-Around A Big-Dead-Ugly Club"

(Author's Note: In less than three years, to have achieved a virtually 100% interior remodeling and equipment replacement job and to now have reached approximately 10% market penetration, where the club's old bad reputation of ugliness and nastiness had been established for years and years, is truly a remarkable achievement!)

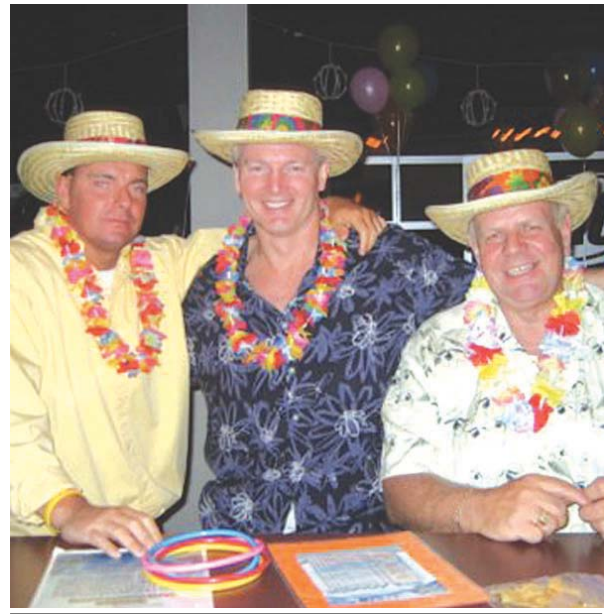
Q. Lyle, I must congratulate you on what I witnessed last Summer when I visited you at the MAC. I mean, what you've accomplished and are accomplishing there is really excellent. I think you've done an amazing job with your complete overhaul and renewal of the MAC. I know you did not just 'roll into Kingston with a pocket full of money' and simply make this

happen. It had to take an awful lot of creativity and imagination to do what you've done. Please tell us about this amazing turnaround process you went through.

A. The first step was to look at where the areas we could impact the most to achieve the greatest difference. The strategy becomes a multi-faceted approach to different problem areas. There was a problem area with facilities, there was a problem area with equipment, there was a problem area with programming and there was a problem area with personnel. So basically, you take the four or five key problem areas that must be changed and get to work. In the beginning, you're studying and developing an improvement program for each of these areas. There is a juggling act because, even though you have priority items, you have to do many things at the same time.

We started with the biggest problem first: **Facilities.** The club had gotten a really bad reputation. This place was amazing! Even within our industry, Sal Pelligrino had called it "The ugliest club in New York State!" And, you can quote him on that. For ten years, the prior owner had not reinvested in the club. Sal is a very knowledgeable and pretty high profile guy who sees a ton of clubs. Sal has probably seen every club in the State, so when Sal Pelligrino says it's the ugliest club in the state, you **KNOW IT IS!** I kind of keep that as a back drop in my mind for fun.

To give you a little better 'picture', they had converted a roller rink from years past into a basketball court. Then, they installed a 300 foot long, 10' high chain link fence completely surrounding the basketball court. It was right in the middle of the fitness center space. So, when you first walked into the club, you felt like you were in a New York City playground! There was a lot of 'cold steel'! We had to remove that fence immediately; it was an eyesore. The fence made the club appear as if there were prisoners inside the basketball court playing basketball and not allowed to get out! I do not believe I have ever seen anything quite like that anywhere in the country before. Because it was three indoor tennis courts first, then a roller rink before they converted it to a health club, the entire huge ceiling was all black with this big



Lyle 'Making It Fun!' With Members
 Dave Waage (L) & Bob Lavery (R)

cyclone fence around the court and all of the equipment was jammed around on the outside between the fence and the walls. It was a tough layout. Also, remember... there were no windows! So, it was dark as heck inside! We painted the entire ceiling our first month there. I contracted with a local painting company who came in on a Saturday afternoon at 5 pm and as we moved equipment out of the way of the truck, he'd paint the ceiling a new, off-white color. It was one of the hardest things we ever did. *During this entire club remodeling we only closed one day.* The painting of the ceiling lasted all Saturday night and all day Sunday and into Sunday night, so we could be open for business on Monday! So, when members began to arrive on Monday morning the entire ceiling had been painted. It was tough. Every time the truck made a pass we had to move all of the machines out of the way. We had six guys moving equipment. But, sometimes you're better off with three guys who really know what they're doing moving equipment, than with 20 guys who don't know what they're doing!

So, from the facility standpoint, while we're finished painting the ceiling, the next step was to peel off the metal skin from the front of the building so we could install a new entrance and 70' of new 12' high glass windows across the front of the club. At the same time, we were ordering new equip-

ment and getting rid of old equipment. Simultaneously, we were getting to know and working through the personnel. We were looking for the personnel who were committed to staying. We were letting employees who demonstrated they did not care know that other opportunities awaited them elsewhere. Essentially, almost the entire staff had to go because nearly all of them had a losing attitude about the club. From the original 35 employees, aside from three group exercise instructors, only two former employees remained within one year of the club change: Debbie Zibella, an Office Manager and Alan Glassman, a Trainer. Those two staff members had shown willingness to change and a commitment to the business and the members. Often times, when you're associated in a losing environment too long, some people can never manage to pull themselves out of that negative mindset that gets programmed into the back of their minds. Like we haven't heard this before... *'That won't work here, this area is different!'* Sometimes, you just have to start over with the right mentality and the right culture. It's about building the culture. We now have a great and dedicated full-time staff of 12 and another 25 part-time people. I still serve as a General Manager, but Josh Stratton and Debbie Zibella both serve as Co-Managers with me and have exhibited the ability and commitment necessary for building
(See Lyle Shuler page 18)



"MAC" The Club Pet

This is just a partial list of some of the best gyms and talented owners who have attended a Thomas Plummer Company seminar this year..

All looking for that edge in a tough market:

Absolute Fitness - Pensacola FL, ACAC Fitness & Wellness Center - Charlottesville VA, Amelia Wellness Center - Amelia Island FL, American Fitness Center - Ingleside IL, American Health & Racquet - Myrtle Beach SC, Anastasia's Club Fit - Pacific Grove CA, Anatomies of Fattiesburg - Fattiesburg MS, Answer Fitness - North Attleboro MA, AIA Blackbelt Academy - Monroe NJ, Athletic Club of Naples - Naples FL, Attitudes... Fitness for Women - Deltona FL, Balanced Health and Fitness - East Falmouth MA, Basic Training Fitness Club - Menlo Park CA, Beamount Health & Fitness - Beamount TX, Bolly Eusters - Ludington MI, Benefitness - Houston TX, Ebianc's Fitness Center - Finesford MA, Dia Sky - Newington CT, Dia Vanilla Athletic Club - Arnold MD, Dill Eumrett's Success Studio - Charlottesville VA, Elation Sports - Alameda CA, Eddy Principal - Rochester Hills MI, Eddy Zone Sports and Fitness - Weymising PA, Eddyworks - Lubbock TX, Eddyworks for Women - Durham NC, Erenda Athletic Clubs - Turlock CA, Erevard Racquet Club - Erevard NC, Erick Eccles - Cockeysville MD, Euilf Solid - Columbus OH, California Family Fitness - Carmichael CA, Calla's Health & Fitness - Tampa FL, Cardiac Club Fitness Centers - Desrehan LA, Carmel Fitness & Racquet Club - Carmel NY, Carolina Woman - Cornelius NC, Cascade Gym - Cascade MI, Castle Hill Specialized Fitness - Austin TX, Centerfield Sports and Fitness - Griffin GA, Central Park Athletic Club - Lisle IL, Channel Island Workout Sport - Oxnard CA, Chicago Fitness Center - Chicago IL, Christi's Family Fitness - Vero Beach FL, Clare Health and Fitness - Clare MI, Club Corp - New York City NY, Club Fit of Steven's Point - Stevens Point WI, Club Fit of West Ridgeview - West Ridgeview MA, Club Fitness SS - Jackson CA, Club Fitness - Hoboken NJ, Club Legends - Tallahassee FL, Club Nutrition and Fitness - Springfield MO, Club One Inc. - San Francisco CA, Columbia Basin Racquet Club - Richland WA, Contours Express - Houston TX, Contours Express - Costa Mesa CA, Contours Express - Houston TX, Contours Express - Ann Arbor MI, Contours Express - Cape Coral FL, Contours Express - Middlebro MA, Contours Express - West Exbury MA, Contours Express - St. Augustine FL, Cordova Athletic Club - Cordova TN, Core Fitness - Truckee CA, Cybex Woman - Worthington OH, David Square Fitness & Spa - Providence RI, Debi's Personal Training - Crafton OH, Desoto Athletic Club - South Haven MS, Euclyde Diamond Athletic Club - Euclyde NY, Downtown Athletic Club - Marion OH, Doylestown Hospital - Doylestown PA, Eagle Fitness - Kansas City MO, Eagle Fitness, Inc - Carson City NV, East Fishkills Sports - Wappingers Falls NY, East Shore Athletic Club - Mt. Pleasant SC, East Shore Health & Racquet - North Charleston SC, Eastlake Athletic Club - Elkhart IN, Elements for Women - NY NY, Empower Fitness - Portland OR, Energy Fitness - Toronto Canada, Energy Fitness - Fadsuclah KY, Energy Sports & Fitness - Elizabethtown KY, Energy Sports & Fitness - Lexington KY, Evergreen Fitness - Fort Townsend WA, Executive Fitness - Santa Esca CA, Extreme Family Fitness - Modesto CA, Extreme Fitness - South Haven MS, Fastrack Fitness - Town & Country MO, Fieldhouse Fitness Center - Justin TX, Fisher Island - Fisher Island FL, Fit & Fabulous - Fairfield IA, Fit For Life Center - Arlington TX, Fit Happens - Allamuchy NJ, Fit One - Chico CA, Fit Systems / Club Energy - Elizabethtown KY, Fitcorp - Boston MA, Fitness 180 - Evesville CA, Fitness Concepts Health Club Gardner - Gardner MA, Fitness Crossroads - St. Anthony MN, Fitness Factory Monticello - Monticello NY, Fitness First - Plantation FL, Fitness First - Euseburg CO, Fitness Forum Florence - Florence SC, Fitness Lady North - Edgeland MS, Fitness Millennium - Eno NY, Fitness One - Fennett MO, Fitness Pro Team - Conway AR, Fitness Solutions - Los Altos CA, Fitness Together - Westwood MA, Fitology - Timonium MD, Flex Fit Energy Club - Lone Beach MS, Flexx Fitness - Napa CA, Focus Fitness - Boston MA, Forever Fit - Watertown MA, Four Court Racquet and Fitness - Cumberland RI, Foxy's Fitness for Women - Eaton Rouge LA, Foxy's Health & Racquet Club - Eaton Rouge LA, Fredericksburg Athletic Club TX - Fredericksburg TX, Free Motion Fitness - Sandy UT, Fuel Fitness - Woburn MA, Fusion Fitness - Natick MA, Fusion Fitness Santa Esca - Santa Esca CA, G Form Fitness - Brockfield WI, Gainesville Health & Fitness - Gainesville FL, Galveston Health & Racquet Club - Galveston TX, Generations Health Club - Auburn CA, Global Health & Fitness - Leominster MA, Gold's Gym - Jupiter FL, Gold's Gym - Miami FL, Gold's Gym - Deerfield Beach FL, Gold's Gym Duluth - Duluth GA, Gold's Gym - Sacramento CA, Gold's Gym of Eurlington - Eurlington NC, Gold's Gym of Deerpark - Edgewood NY, Gold's Gym of Joliet - Joliet IL, Gold's Gym of Laurel - Laurel MD, Gold's Gym of Ormond Beach - Ormond Beach FL, Gold's Gym of Tewksbury - Tewksbury MA, Gold's Gym of Vacaville - Vacaville CA, Gold's Gym of Waldorf - Waldorf MD, Grande Eonde Fitness Club - La Grande OR, Grayton Beach Fitness - Grayton Beach FL, Gym X Filleen - Filleen TX, Hampton Hill Athletic Club - Columbia SC, Health Unlimited - MA, Hairy MD, Highlander Health & Fitness - Fredericksburg VA, House of Fitness - Miami FL, Impact Sports & Fitness - Cordele CA, InnerStrength - Nashville TN, It Figures - Glenn Heights TX, It Figures - Mc Finney TX, It Figures of Hickory Creek - Hickory Creek TX, It Figures of Keller - Keller TX, It Figures of McFinney - McFinney TX, JM Power Center - Eatontown NJ, Juliet Parks District - Joliet IL, Jardia Life Fitness Training - Dana Point CA, Kent Women's Aerobic & Fitness Center - Vent WA, LA Workout - Simi Valley CA, LA Workout - Camarillo CA, Ladies Choice Fitness Center - Summerville SC, Lady Fitness - Sacramento CA, Lifebridge Health and Fitness - Baltimore MD, Lifequest - North Charleston SC, Lifequest Health & Fitness - Charleston SC, LifeStyle Frunelate Fitness - Salinas CA, Living Well Lady Fitness - Coral Gables FL, Lord's Gym of Clermont - Clermont FL, Lord's Gym of Ocala - Ocala FL, Lower Valley Athletic Club - Fresser WA, Mavericks Sports Club - Concord CA, Memorial Hospital West - Hollywood FL, Mendocino Sports Club - Fort Erage CA, Menifee Valley Athletic Club - Sun City CA, Merritt Athletic Club - Baltimore MD, Metropolitan Health Club - Ecstun MA, Mid-Hudson Athletic Club - Finaston NY, Mcreau Fitness - Zachary LA, Motion Fitness & Racquet Club - New Berlin WI, Mount Auburn Club - Watertown MA, New Corp Fitness - Staten Island NY, North Columbus Athletic Club - Columbus GA, North East Sports Training - Warwick RI, North Shore Athletic Club - Ewerly MA, Northwest Athletic

2 days... new ideas... more money...

Club - Itasca IL, One Fit Life - Greenwood IN, One on One Personal Fitness - Belleville Ontario, One With Heart Portland - Portland OR, Optimal Fitness Center - San Carlos CA, Paradium Sports Club of Del Norte - Sacramento CA, Parisi's Sports Clubs USA - Midland Park NJ, Peak Performance Fitness Center - Broadview Heights OH, Perfect Shapes - Webster MA, Performax Gyms - Kaysville UT, Philbin's Athletic Training Center - Gaithersburg MD, Pine Grove Health & Country Club - Camillus NY, Pleasanton Athletic Center - Pleasanton TX, Plus One Fitness - Jacksonville FL, Powerhouse Gym - Kokomo IN, Powerhouse Gym Columbia - Columbia TN, Powerhouse Gym Hudson - Weeki Wachle FL, Powerhouse Gym Jackson - Jackson MS, Powerhouse Gym of Benton Harbor - Benton Harbor MI, Powerhouse Gym of Berlin - Berlin CT, Powerhouse Gym of Cranston - Cranston RI, Powerhouse Gym of Houston - Houston TX, Powerhouse Gym of Sylvania, Powerhouse Gym of Wixom - Wixom MI, Premier Fitness - Nanuet NY, Pro Fitness Health & Exercise Clubs - Lexington Park MD, Pro Fitness USA - Mt. Vernon OH, Professional Wellness Associates - Portland ME, Punch Fitness - Del Ray Beach FL, Pure Austin Fitness - Austin TX, Pyramid Fitness Center - Lubbock TX, QLS Family Fitness Center - Humble TX, QM2 - Daway CA, Queen of the Valley Hospital - Napa CA, Quest Fitness - Ellicott City MD, Rehab Results - Redland Bay Australia, Reshape Fitness - Collierville TN, Richmond Fitness/American Family Fitness - Glen Allen VA, Riviera Country Club - Coral Gables FL, Rock Hill YMCA - Rock Hill SC, Schimmel Fitness - Zanessville OH, Sim's Health & Racket Club - Charlton MA, Simply Fit - Melbourne FL, Solid Impact Fitness - Caledonia MI, South Austin Gym - Austin TX, South Florida Exxing - N Miami Beach FL, Southlake Nautilus Health Merrillville - Merrillville IN, Sporthaven Health Club - Paradise CA, St. Vincent Sports Performance Center - Indianapolis IN, Stan Bennett's Health & Fitness - Sonoma CA, Body and Soul - Findlay OH, Charles Chehardy - Baton Rouge MS, David Kress - Timley Park IL, Dr Charles King, Jaime Llopis - Citrus Heights CA, World Gym Trinidad - Trinidad West Indies, 4 minutes 2 Fitness - Scotts Valley CA, Al Stockwell - Clinton Township MI, Een Quist - Whitefish Bay WI, Blake Brockmeyer - Ft. Worth TX, Capital Club - Richmond VA, Che-Sheng Lin - Erick NJ, Dan Lerma - Houston TX, Dawn Burkhart - Indianapolis IN, Dawn Leughlin - Crete IL, Ed Pipp - Greendale WI, Frank Nunez - Lisle IL, Greg Anderson - Portage IN, Gregg Lewis - Buffalo NY, Jeff Drus - Indianapolis IN, Fathy Costas - New Hyde Park NY, Kevin Smyth - Cleveland OH, Kristin Lawson - Oklahoma City

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...Lyle Shuler

continued from page 16

a winning organization.

Q. Lyle, this is a classic club renaissance story. How did you pull all this remodeling work, re-equipping, re-staffing and re-branding in the marketplace together financially?

A. We had to paint a picture out there of what the future plans for the club were. I had to establish myself as a serious operator who was going to tackle the challenges of the club. I had to restore confidence that I was making a commitment to reinvesting in the club and that I would not settle for less than quality equipment and programs. My first challenge was to make sure that our 600 members knew that they had a club owner that was going to be committed to improvements and upgrades. My thought process was that if I could get those existing 600 people to buy into the fact that we're going to make this better, here is how we're going to do it and here is what we're gonna do, they would then tell their friends, and we would then start the referral process. From a marketing strategy, the marketing arm is another one of those *plates* that you must *start and keep spinning at the same time* you're doing the construction, the renovations and the personnel changes. So, the marketing arm must get the message out to existing members and to the community. We told the community we had made a new commitment, had a new name, new club, new programs, so come see us. Basically, we did a Grand Opening. I did the same things I would do with clients when I worked with Sales Makers. I did the 'Sneak Preview Construction Party', attracting a lot of people through local businesses. We did a lot of 'outreach work', Norm. One of the things I saw a lot of success with during my time with Sales Makers and have used continually here was just making sure that the community knew I was there and getting our people out in the community everyday doing something to reach them! Faxing updates to corporations, knocking on local businesses' doors and introducing ourselves, and explaining our new investment in the club in the local area!

Financially, it was real-

ly challenging to get financing for some of the things I wanted to do. In my area the banks are all operating on a 100% collateral rule. I own the business, but not the building. So, the club did not represent any collateral to any banks that I spoke to. Used equipment meant nothing to them and coupled with the poor reputation and weak financials, it wasn't a promising proposition. So, getting money to fund the actual renovations was by far the greatest challenge. One of the most reinforcing things for me was the positive feedback from people in the community on our making the investment in the club. The encouragement from local business owners provided motivation for me along with the staff and members. Basically, I had a couple of months of operating capital. Fortunately, January and February of 2003 were my first two operating months. That helped tremendously. It could have been tougher if the first two months of operation were June and July!

It was a lot about getting the ball rolling, picking up momentum and just keeping your hands on that momentum not letting momentum fall back. That is a big key to this type of turn around situation.

Q. Lyle, clearly you make a great effort to "Make It Fun!" at the MAC! Share your thinking on the importance of FUN in your and other clubs.

A. As club owner/operators, our leadership responsibility is to assemble a team who know how to enjoy their work... not just come to work and do their job, but come to work, enjoy their work and have a passion for it. As club owners, if we don't keep a FUN element in the club for our staff members, we will not have a staff that makes it fun for the members.

People can work anywhere, do any job and get a paycheck, but I don't think there are many industries where people can work and get satisfaction and reward that we can get when we do a good job. I think "Making It Fun" integrates really well with the passion for helping other people and the passion for improving lifestyles and really making a difference. I think the FUN aspect of it is what can distinguish our industry from a lot of other industries. Our employees need to know that they *all still have to tow the*

line. But, we know that if our staff and employees are having a good time and they like it, two things happen from that: #1 is that our members feel it, they sense it and they like to be around people like that and #2, the staff stays. It has something to do with staff retention. People like to stay where they're having a good time, they have fun and they can be themselves.

Author's Note: Lyle Schuler noted something in this next comment that *nobody has ever noticed or mentioned to me during my 12 years of CLUB INSIDER publishing.* And, it is important. Schuler observed: "*Norm, I think in every CLUB INSIDER newspaper you've put out you've got "Make It Fun!" somewhere in there! Give yourself a plug there, Norm. No, I'll give you a plug. You're reminding club operators everyday... Don't forget the importance of making and keeping it fun! Because, if it's not fun anymore, then it becomes more like work. When it's more like work, we're not putting out the same product anymore. We put out a different product when it's just like 'we're going to work' than when we're having fun. When we're having fun, that's the right product because we're making people want to be there at the club with us! For years, in every one of her lectures, Sandy Coffman has taught the importance of members having fun. People want to be around happy people. So, that's another one of our leadership responsibilities as club owners. We've got to keep it fun so the entire club works as a whole."*

Club Insider - CONGRATULATIONS Lyle! You've very effectively summarized, better than anyone ever, the campaign that I've been on for 12 years of CLUB INSIDER publishing. While some may have noticed and I think do realize exactly WHY I publish those small little "Make It Fun!" ads each month, nobody has ever articulated it to me this well. Nice.

Q. Lyle, speaking of "Making It Fun!" you've certainly adopted that in your Firehouse Kid's Club depicted on this page. Amazing work; this is another example of your genius and ability to create a happy, fun feeling in your club. Please share with our readers the cool



Lyle At The MAC Firehouse Kid's Club

story of how your dog named Mac, your Fire House Kid's Club and the name of your club all tie in together.

A. It starts with when I had to come up with a new name for the club. First, I do like the 'Athletic Club' component in the name of clubs. It's not too hard, it's not too soft and people can identify with it. So, I have a German Shepherd, who has been part of the family for the last three years, and his name is "Mac". We're located in a region called the Mid-Hudson area, about 40 miles upstate from New York along the Hudson River. I like the way MAC rolls off the tongue so I decided to leave the H out of it, and name the club The MAC, (Mid-Hudson Athletic Club). My dog Mac has been a source of joy in my life. He's brought me some luck, and I figured he'd bring some good luck to the club. So, in combination with the name of the club, the dog and the tie in to the Fire House graphics for the Kid's Club center, it all seemed to work! It gives the club a little extra "heart" that there is a lovable pet, this German Shepherd named Mac, who comes into the club everyday and hangs out in the membership sales office. Guess what happens? Everybody that comes into the office pets Mac and they often tell their dog and cat stories when they are coming in for info about memberships! Mac becomes a great ice breaker and provides guests and members a chance to speak about something aside from membership info!

As to how I came up with the Fire Station child care theme, it had to do with the traveling and visits to many clubs around the country. The majority of the clubs out there view the kids' area like a 'holding cell'... a small place that they have left over in the club where they provide this minimum service to 'hold' the kids while the parents exercise. There often is never anything really special about this area. They usually are kind of boring. They may have a game, some toys and a VCR or DVD player, but further options beyond those items are rarely seen. When it came to redesigning a new club, I felt like I should ask what would guys like Walt Disney or Roger Ralph (in our industry) do to "Make It Fun!" and make it different? Do you remember when Roger built that amazing child care center with the big tree in it down at the BelAir Athletic Club? You did a report on it Norm in Club Insider years ago. So, I tried to follow Walt and Roger's lead and *get out of the box.* I asked that question. They wouldn't just create and build something *average.* They would give it a *name, they'd give it a logo, and they'd give it a theme!* So, I felt like a Firehouse theme would be a fun theme. A lot of kids want to be firemen or policemen. I won an animated fire truck at a local County Fair the summer before, and that was the conclusion of my scientific research. I hired some artists and some local contractors, and they built and

(See Lyle Shuler page 29)



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A White Paper

Challenging Views of the Health Club Industry

By: Will Phillips

Part I

(Publisher's Note: Throughout this "White Paper", you will see references to Action Boxes. There are six in all and each of them is important. Because of editorial space constraints, they are not available here in print. However, we have put them on our website for you, so you may print them out and act on them. Additionally, we've placed the worksheet referenced at the end of column #3 on our

website. Goto: www.clubinsidernews.com and click on This Month. Under Inside the Insider, click on A White Paper, and a printable file will load. We hope you find these suggestions helpful.)

OVERVIEW

This first annual white paper about the evolution and the barriers of the health club industry places a heavy emphasis on some core challenges. For those willing to think "outside the box," it may help you to double the size of your business.

TEN CHALLENGES TO THE STATUS QUO

Having spent all year thinking about health club strategies and where the market is headed came to a culmination when I attended the International Health and Racquet Sports Association (IHRSA) convention with thousands of other people thinking about health clubs in the same SPACE. Consciously and unconsciously, I picked up hundreds and thousands of thoughts that made it difficult to sleep! Post conference my thoughts settled. It was a perfect time to reflect on the state of the industry. This white paper is intended to share those thoughts, particularly the challenging ones that can have a profound, transformational impact on you and your business. A worksheet on these ten factors is at the end of this Part I report. It can be a good place to keep notes on what you will do with this information.

FACTOR 1: SKIN-TO-SKIN

Health clubs have historically neglected the emotional and spiritual sides of their business; their focus is on the physical body. Five years ago, I suggested that health clubs would leap forward dramatically if they would hire employees who have social science degrees. These are people who understand the human condition and how to relate and connect with others. Of course, you don't need a social science degree to do that, but when you get a degree in exercise physiology, there is a likely chance that this skill may be underdeveloped.

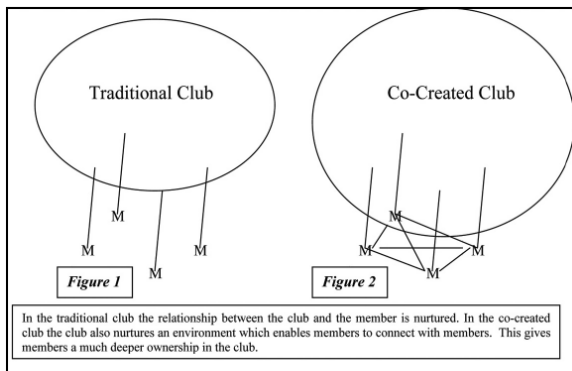
At IHRSA, Justin Tamsett (REX Round Table's Associate in Australia) presented a major program on skin-to-skin contact in health club marketing. Dean Ornish, who was a keynote speaker, commented, "If we don't deal with the underlying psychic, social and emotional needs, and even spiritual dimensions, and focus only on behavior such as diet and exercise, it's very hard to motivate

people to maintain healthy lifestyle changes." Ornish said the same thing ten years ago. Is anyone listening?

Community is the ultimate skin-to-skin. Building community is something that happens as a side-effect of group programming and on fitness circuits. You can consciously nurture community if you are willing to work in that arena and learn the methods and skills that have been used for millenniums to build a strong sense of community. Businesses traditionally build relationships between the customer and the business (Figure 1). Community occurs when the



Will Phillips



customers build relationships with customers as well (Figure 2).

The multiple connections in the community figure create more bonds to the club community. This means more usage and more retention of members. Notice the large circle in Figure 2, which surrounds the members. This is the environment, largely created by the club, which nurtures member-to-member connections. This might be as simple as a cluster of invitingly comfortable soft chairs as in a Starbucks corner (See Action Box 1).

Ornish continues, "We don't work on the behaviors in isolation; we work on the issues that prompt those behaviors. That's where clubs can make a difference. If clubs actively foster the sense of community as something more than a place where one comes and spends a half hour on the Stairmaster and then leaves. If this unmet need can be addressed, they'll enjoy a real competitive advantage."

BUILDING SKIN-TO-SKIN RETENTION

We need to experiment with some new models to dramatically drive up retention. Skin-to-skin contact is critical in building emotional bonds between people, and it is these emotional, tribal connections of caring and empathy which are the foundation of all voluntary commitments. Personal training does a great job of building bonds, but if your members are not permanently signed up for PT, those bonds are lost. In most clubs, PT does not exceed a maximum of 20% of the members.

Physical training may be too costly for some to do continuously. We need less expensive ways to build bonds. Enter Group Exercise. The best club I know has about 50% of all member visits involved in Group Exercise. If Group Exercise is led the right way - skin-to-skin - it should result in higher retention. In addition,

(See Will Phillips page 22)

JLR Associates announces the placement of Steve Balaton Wellness Director Brooks Health System

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...Will Phillips

continued from page 20

Further research is necessary to examine retention data comparing similar groups of members for:

- Racquetball
- Tennis
- Personal Training
- Group Exercise
- Fitness Circuits (same time, same group) not just a drop-in circuit

(See Action Box 2)

Several businesses have been creating memorable experiences for their clients. Coca Cola sales people never shared the experience of drinking their product with restaurant and food service customers. So, a small case with two glasses, Coke and ice was created so they can pop one during the sales presentation. Programs, equipment or facility can be copied very quickly. Brand experience can not. When a prospect walks in, do your sales people ever sit down and have a bottle of water with them? Explaining the health benefits of water? The experience helps them remember you differently and creates an emotional connection.

GQ rents hip night clubs several times a year for a week. They redecorate, showcasing their sponsors products; invite celebrities and subscribers to a party. GQ brings its magazine to life in the lounge. What can you do?

Remember the sales force is the primary point for delivering an experience. Does your sales force consistently deliver on the brand experience? Be sure the sales force understands how the brand experience impacts the customer's perceptions and behaviors.

FACTOR 2: THE CLUB INDUSTRY PLATEAUS ON THE "S" CURVE

The "S" Curve is the growth curve followed by all industries (for more information, see article at www.rexon-line.org. under Management Briefings). A key fact indicating a plateau in the club industry is that over the last 22 years the number of clubs has increased faster (370 %) than the number of users (270 %), so that the average number of users per club in the United States has declined from 2800 to 1680. How many new clubs and studios have opened up in your area in the last three years? Unfortunately, too many and the field is overcrowded.

Another indicator of the lull on the "S" curve is the emerging realization that no matter how good the club, there is a tendency for membership levels to plateau about two years after its last major renovation or opening. Sales now become a replacement activity and not a growth activity. Growth seems to come only from opening a new facility or doing a major renovation of the current facility. John McCarthy, Executive Director of

IHRSA, talks about this in the March issue of *Club Business International* in his article, "Commoditization and The Quest for Innovation." He is reflecting on the trend that occurs in all industries; during the emergent phases of the industry, owners band together to learn from one another. As the industry and its association mature, information is traded and copied so that each club becomes more similar to one another in an effort to meet the industry standards and follow the best practices. "This process of commoditization invariably leads to homogenization," as John McCarthy says so well. This creates a challenge in forming a competitive strategy for your marketplace. All of the information regarding the club industry: (its materials, conferences and industry gurus) teach how to distinguish your club from your competitors by creating a unique selling proposition or competitive strategy. Unfortunately, as the industry homogenizes, uniqueness becomes increasing difficult. Everybody is swimming in the same ocean and trying to avoid being bitten by the competitive sharks within (See Action Box 3).

Blue oceans are the breakout for those clubs that truly want to address the competitive issue by removing it altogether. A blue ocean is one in which there are no competitors; the water is free of sharks. It is creating your business in such a way that competition is irrelevant. This requires you to think "out-of-the-box" in some rather dramatic ways. For example, look at the traditional three-ring circus and you'll realize it is a declining industry. To stay competitive, circuses added exotic live animals, but these proved costly and drove profits down. The three-ring circus also was challenged by new forms of entertainment - video games and TV.

Then along came an entirely new strategy. Cirque De Soleil eliminated all the high-cost items in the circus business: putting up and taking down tents, maintaining and traveling with large animals, and producing three simultaneous shows at one time. Cirque De Soleil eliminates all those, yet keeps the magic and wonder of the circus, and in fact, maybe pushes it up a notch or two. And then, it adds new value that simply did not exist in the circus: comfortable indoor venues, stunning costumes, original music, and a story line that runs throughout the show. As a result, instead of having three rings for one price, they are up to six separate shows all occurring in Las Vegas at a price that is five times a circus ticket. Cirque De Soleil competes in a blue ocean. Was this conscious? Perhaps... Can it be copied? Yes!

In the club industry, Curves has created a blue ocean strategy by reducing major costs of equipment and facilities. They address missing elements for half the population (women) through increased safety and an emphasis on weight loss. Whether this is the best

(See Will Phillips page 24)

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Denise Austin

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...Will Phillips

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design or not is open for debate, but by creating a blue ocean, Curves has become the fastest growing franchise in the world and has attracted a market that is atypical for health clubs. Some hopeful club pundits have said Curves members will out-grow curves and graduate to "real" health clubs. To date, I have seen little evidence that this hopeful thinking is reality.

FACTOR 3: HYPERTROPHY OF EQUIPMENT

Hypertrophy is when a species develops such a sophisticated adaptation to part of its environment that it ultimately kills the species. For example, the Irish Red Elk developed a huge rack of horns for winning mating contests with other males (I wonder if this is where our slang term "horny" comes from). Anyway, the male with

the largest rack of horns usually got to be the one that reproduced. Thus, a large rack of horns was genetically favored. Each generation grew heavier and larger racks. Unfortunately, this reproductive success led to racks so heavy it was difficult for the elk to hold its head up and impossible for the elk to move through the woods without entangling its horns. Now that all the males had large racks, they all starved and the species became extinct. Ironic, but in some cases, success does lead to failure. Fortune magazine once commented that "the single best predictor of business failure was a previous period of strong growth."

So, the question is, whether equipment in health clubs has reached the point of hypertrophy - has it become overly specialized and overly dominant? When I visited the 2005 IHRSA Trade Show and gazed upon a sea of equipment, I wondered, "have we gone too

far and done too much with the equipment?" When one company succeeds with an elliptical machine, another company wants to copy and improve it, and then another makes one less costly and the result is dozens of choices for each type of equipment. Even dumbbells have an extraordinary and seemingly pointless variety: rubberized, metal handled, color coded, etc. My concern for overdeveloped equipment is that equipment dominates the show, and thus is a driving economic force in the club industry and in IHRSA. I suspect that equipment manufacturers provide a significant part of IHRSA's operating budget. The danger here is that each club has outsourced its entire R&D effort and may have lost control of it. The equipment manufacturers' concern, of course, is equipment sales, while the clubs' concern is attracting and retaining members and delivering results for them. These goals may be in

conflict. More and better equipment is not always the best investment to help a club achieve its goals, yet equipment advertising dominates the industry.

Let's think about the other end of the spectrum. Little or no equipment is a blue ocean strategy requiring more exploration. Unfortunately, only a
(See Will Phillips page 30)



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An exclusive column featured only in Norm Cates' CLUB INSIDER

By: Michael Scott Scudder

10 Questions A Smart Club Operator Should Ask Each Month!

Norm Cates requested that I reproduce for publication as a “special column” this month my sold-out IHRSA Club Business Entrepreneur Conference seminar that I presented on September 8, 2005 in Las Vegas. So here it is... with some explanatory notes included.

How “The 10 Questions” Developed

I interviewed CEO's, CFO's and executives of large chains, one-off, high-success clubs (both large and small) and smaller regional chains, and I researched archived articles from web sites, publication libraries and my own collection. I sought to find what was common to all of them, what they did, and how they taught managers and directors. I also checked with tech support of a major software company to see what reports are most frequently used and why.

Why These “10 Questions” Are Especially Important NOW

- Consumer Confidence from all pollsters is presently at a 3-year low.
- Investor Confidence is mirroring the consumers' feelings - also near the 3-year low.
- The economy is definitely slowing down.
- The immediate aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita are MUCH HIGHER fuel prices and no sign of a significant backtrack anytime soon.
- Interest rates continue to rise gradually and money is tightening.
- Consumer goods, services and basic costs are up 14% since January '05.
- Only 20% of Americans polled say the economy is getting better (a 5-year low).

The 10 Questions

Question One: Did we make a profit?

NOTE: The importance of this is that you *must* measure profitability on a month-by-month basis to assure profitability for the year. It also helps absorb those couple of bad months that most of you have during the year (often in the summer).

Question Two: What was our sales breakdown?

NOTE: If you see that your sales breakdown is over 80% membership dues-based, you have a problem: you are a membership-dependent business and that will not bode well in tough times, which may be just ahead for our industry. Also, your sales breakdown will tell you if your club is making enough higher-margin sales, or if the concentration is on low-margin memberships. Most clubs report that they are now either not making any profit on memberships or that the profit margin is very low single digits.

Question Three: What percentage of gross is our EFT base?

NOTE: If you have an overbalance of prepaid annual memberships, you have three distinct problems: **1.** The majority of your revenue is in non-asset form (a prepaid membership is a liability); **2.** You have low sustainable cash flow (which is provided by contracted monthly payment memberships in asset form); and **3.** Your renewal percentage will be lower than what is acceptable (in mid-to-higher priced clubs, prepaid cash memberships renew at a far lower-than-industry-average percentage rate).

ADDITIONAL NOTE: I like to see EFT monthly membership revenues at no less than 60% of total membership revenues, and I strongly suggest that the ratio be 80% or higher of total membership revenues. The higher your monthly EFT, the more predictable your cash flows and the more likely you are to be able to weather a storm.

Question Four: What

was our net monthly loss on EFT?

NOTE: Net monthly loss will indicate what quality membership agreements your staff is writing, what your “up front” fee should be and what your predictable retention will be. You must keep your “net monthly loss” (bad checks, over drafted credit cards, etc.) at 3% or less. This will relatively assure you a mid-60% retention rate.

Question Five: What was our facility usage summary?

NOTE: This is an incredibly useful report that very few facilities follow up on. It tells you with certainty what your marketplace is using - patterns, times and what to place your management energies on. It also helps you to allocate, and in many cases, reduce staff expenses (Most clubs still staff as though the work day is 9 to 5!).

Question Six: What was our guest traffic?

NOTE: This report tells you how your marketing efforts are doing. It also tells you what your sales training needs to be. Most clubs do not pay enough attention to guests, thus do not sell as many memberships as they could. Frankly, they forget that, to sell a membership, you gotta have somebody walk through the door!

Question Seven: What was our check-in traffic?

NOTE: This tells you who is checking in and when... it helps you in your programming and staff allocation. An example: you don't want to run a program of high-physical-activity when your check-ins show that the majority of people in the club at that time are over 50! Also, you don't want to staff the reception area and the fitness floor with teenagers at that time... you better have staffers of an appropriate age match if you expect to keep those members!

Question Eight: What was our program user traffic and percentage?

NOTE: This is another report that tells you how membership-dependent your club is... and what you need to market to create an “internal flow of prospects.” It also helps you to determine how to create potential program buyers from non-members, thereby adding to your revenues and creating prospects at the same time.

Question Nine: What was our class attendance?

NOTE: This tells you how to fine-tune your Group Exercise programming... and honestly, it tells you the viability of your entire Group Exercise program (class attendance vs. overall attendance, percentage of members attending classes). My friend Rich Boggs, CEO of *Body Training Systems*, agrees with me that over 80% of clubs today have less than 10% of their members attending group exercise... and thus are losing a ton of money every year! You cannot subsidize programming, especially in tight economic times.

Question Ten: What was our sales-per-member analysis?

NOTE: This signifies who is spending how much in your club. You must “monetize” a certain percentage of your membership (I believe that figure to be 20%)... otherwise you are not likely to ever have a profitable club operation. This



Michael Scott Scudder

report will also tell you the effectiveness of your personal training program.

ADDITIONAL

NOTE: If you combine the information from this report with a solid demographic analysis of your 12-minute-drive-time market area, you will know where to market for “higher-dollar customers.”

(Michael Scott Scudder, a Contributing Author for CLUB INSIDER, is a PERSONAL BUSINESS TRAINER who offers private workshops, a sales system, club marketing systems, online training seminars, and telephone conferencing on pertinent fitness business matters. Michael offers FREE to all CLUB INSIDER readers his “Evaluating Your Group Exercise Program” system document. Michael can be reached at 505-751-4248 or by email at michaelsscudder@yahoo.com)

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Training Your Sales Team Year Round

By: Casey Conrad

Part I

Even for clubs with high, non-dues revenue, a majority of most clubs' income comes from membership sales. This means that if a club wants to maximize its financial success it must have well-trained salespeople who convert 60-70% of their tours into new paying members. For any club to have that kind of overall closing percentage, it must have a well planned, well-executed sales training program that functions year-round, NOT just when a new employee is hired or when sales are slumping! This article, the first of a 4-part series, will explore one of the four sales

training areas necessary for success, "core competency."

Core competency training refers to all the training involved with a new employee launch. The other three areas, which will be covered in subsequent articles, are accountability tools, weekly sales meetings and daily, mini-trainings. Without all four components, it is easy for sales managers to allow poor habits or low sales numbers to slide by. With all four components, however, a sales manager will stay on top of every aspect of a salesperson's performance, resulting in better managed and more successful team sales.

Core competency is the first and perhaps most important aspect of a good sales training program because it lays the

foundation for a new employee's expectations, habits and starting skill level. Unfortunately, in the fitness industry, new employee training all too often consists of one or two days of shadowing a senior salesperson, followed by the "OTJ" training method. "OTJ" stands for "On the Job" training and often results in inconsistent sales processes and frustrated salespeople who leave after six months of mediocre sales commissions. This is not always the case, but it happens more times than not.

Core competency training should be done over a minimum period of two weeks where the new employee is NOT allowed to sell by himself. Instead, he should be shadowing successful, veteran salespeople and, on the occasions where

they have generated an appointment, he should be accompanying the veteran salesperson who does the selling. If it is near the end of the training period, the decision could be made to let the new employee sell and the veteran shadow.

As it relates to training materials, books, audios, videos and scripts should be incorporated. The reason for the variety of materials is that every person has a different "learning strategy." Some people have to "see" things, some have to "hear" things and others want to "read" things. Still, others like multiple learning sources. Therefore, providing many different tools will improve the learning process for everyone. Certainly, there are hundreds of books, tapes and videos on sales, but I suggest that you try and locate materials that are very specific to the fitness industry so the new employee doesn't have to figure out "What is the best trial close" or "How do I handle the 'Think about it' objection" or "What questions should be asked on an information call." The reality of the situation is that almost all of the scripts I learned in 1986 are totally applicable to the sales process today. So, why go reinvent the wheel? IHRSA (www.IHRSA.org) has made numerous items and recorded hundreds of sessions at conventions. You can also contact your local fitness association for a complete listing of fitness sales publications and resources available.

Even if you don't have the budget to invest in these products or for some reason you don't want to buy them, another strategy is to create your own training videos. Such a suggestion may sound out of the question, but it is actually quite simple to do and has a number of benefits. First of all, creating your own videos will mean that future employees that train at your facility will see exactly what you want them to learn. Second, if you involve other staff members, it will give the materials an added level of credibility, especially if they are involved in the content and even the delivery of information. Finally, if you decide you want to change a script or sales policy-as long as your recorded training is in a "module" format



Casey Conrad

(one small topic at a time)-it is easy to re-do the materials, ensuring you have the most up-to-date information. Most importantly, the recordings don't have to be of professional quality or done in a studio. You can even record the trainer and the employee sitting at a desk going over the information (This technique is usually less intimidating for those being recorded). The only important point is to ensure that a microphone is hard wired to the video so the sound quality is crisp and clear. Later on in this article the agenda of core competency training will be outlined.

In addition to the training materials, several other key training strategies must be followed. First, role-playing is a must. I know, I can hear the groans through the page, but this is imperative. Role-playing is really the only way that a new sales skill can be practiced after memorization. Delivery in sales is everything. And, yes, people will be nervous at first, but eventually, with lots of practice, role-playing becomes natural and even fun with a group of veterans working on advanced objection handling. For role-playing to be effective, some basic rules need to be followed. One, once a role-play situation has begun, the participants MUST STAY IN ROLE until the entire exercise has been completed. Let's face it. If a salesperson were sitting across from a prospect, they wouldn't be able to say, "Oh, wait a minute, I didn't mean to say that. Can we start over?" No. Instead, he would be forced to

(See Casey Conrad page 28)

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...Norm's Notes

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next 5 to 7 years. They are 75,000 square-foot clubs attached to a Marriott Hotel with 150 to 250 rooms. The prototype, upon which the decision was made, has 9,000 members and a waiting list! Good luck Steve and Marriott International!

• Last month I wrote glowingly about the great job **MEREDITH POPLAR** of **IHRSA** had done on the September **NFTJ/IHRSA Club Entrepreneur Conference**. But, I failed to acknowledge and congratulate long-time veteran, **CHUCK LEVE** and the other IHRSA Staff for their great work on the event! So, let me just say: Way to go Chuck and all IHRSA Staff Members that worked on making this 1st Annual **NFTJ/IHRSA event a great success!**

• **Bally's** countdown to **November 30, 2005**, when it will release its revised financial statements is on. The next **Bally**

Total Fitness Board Meeting has been set for **January 26, 2006** in Chicago. **STAY TUNED!**

• Congratulations to the **Sport & Health Clubs' MITCH WALD, CEO, and his Team**; they have announced a multi-year campaign to combat widespread obesity. Teaming up with **Project Fit America (PFA)**, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to improving cardiovascular health and fitness for children (K-12), **Sport & Health plans to raise \$1 million** to install outdoor exercise equipment and establish educational programs at Washington, D.C.-area public schools.

• **ROGER BATES**...a nice guy and original Founding partner of the cool and different **Frog's** chain of 'fun' clubs featuring locations in my dream town of Solana Beach, California and the San Diego area has been named as the **Health Club Operating Partner** for a group called **FocalPoint Partners**, an individual invest-

ment bank whose focus is on mergers and acquisitions with particular interest in the health and sports club industry.

• **SIBEC North America** experienced another great success with its 3rd foray into America. This time **60 club leaders, controlling about 800 clubs**, gathered at the **La Costa Resort** in Carlsbad, California for 3 days of networking, education and fun! **SIBEC North America** will convene next year at **Mohegan Son, Connecticut, September 14-17, 2006**.

• Congratulations to **ART and LINDA CHAPPELL**; they have opened their 3rd Courthouse Athletic Club location in the city of Auburn, California.

• Congratulations to **BRUNO PAULETTO, CEO; JULIE PAULETTO, CFO; and KEN BRADLEY, President** of **Power Systems Sports** as they Celebrate their 20th Anniversary. They provide all kinds of athletic training equipment and supplies. If you're becoming involved in your club

in dedicating space to sports training, contact **Power Systems Sports!** www.power-systems.com

• **SIR RICHARD BRANSON**, arguably one of the world's most prolific entrepreneurs, has bought back a controlling stake in the **Virgin Active health club chain** he had sold to **Bridgepoint** three years back. The price for the 109 clubs is said to have been \$236 million.

• **FitRewards**, the official **Rewards Program of IHRSA**, and **Retention Management** announced on September 21st, a strategic partnership to provide clients integrated retention services. Combining **FitRewards** on-line specialty rewards program and **Retention Management's** unique patent-pending communication system, fitness centers will be able to achieve better penetration with their member rewards programs. **STAY TUNED!**

• **CORRECTION:** Last month we published an inaccur-

rate report about the **Grand Opening of Lifestyle Family Fitness' 27th location** in Apopka, FL. We sincerely apologize for the error. In fact, that was their 21st location to open. **Lifestyle Family Fitness** now has 25 clubs open and in operation, two in presale located in Jacksonville and Altamonte Springs, and #28, just announced, in Brandon, FL.

• **GOD BLESS our Troops, Airmen and Seamen as they serve our country and risk their lives in Iraq, the families of our servicemen and women for their sacrifices, our fellow Americans in the Gulf Coast, the people of IRAQ as they try to survive the murders by the insurgents, and now the families of those killed and injured by the earthquakes in the region around Pakistan. GOD BLESS ALL OF YOU and GOD BLESS AMERICA.**

...Casey Conrad

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work his way out of whatever inappropriate thing he had said.

So, it shouldn't be any different in practice. Second, when role-playing phone scripts, make sure participants are NOT facing one another but rather back

to back so as to more accurately imitate a phone situation. Finally, regardless of how bad the role-playing is, try and find some positive feedback for each participant, followed up with the comment, "What I would like you to work on is . . ." This ensures that participants don't get negative associations with role-playing.

Another key training strategy is shadowing. This was mentioned earlier when discussing a new employee's two-week training period. Shadowing is the process where a new employee follows a veteran employee during the sales process or listens to him while making various phone contacts. For shadowing to be effective, the new salesperson must be matched with a veteran salesperson who knows the company's scripts and policies. In addition, when going on a tour, the veteran salesperson must introduce the new employee to the prospect AND get permission for him to join the tour. Without permission, often the prospect feels overwhelmed (almost ganged up on) and many times won't open up during the needs analysis. In addition, after any shadowing experience (tour or phone work), a de-briefing should occur where the veteran salesperson takes time to explain to the new

employee both positive and challenging aspects to the prospect interaction. This allows the trainee to have a deeper understanding of the "why's" behind the "how's." Finally, when the new employee has memorized his scripts and has shadowed a veteran several times, it is imperative that the roles be reversed and the new employee performs the action and the veteran does the shadowing. This is the ONLY way to ensure that what is being taught is being executed.

The final training strategy necessary is testing. We've all heard the expression, "You must inspect what you expect," and there is nothing like testing to do the inspection! The preferable format is a two-step process where the new employee is first given a written test on the new skill set. Then, once he has passed the written test and shadowed for the right amount of time, an oral test should be given. Of course, some people are better at memorization and others are simply executors who freeze on written tests but can BS their way out of a paper bag. Regardless of his strength or weakness, administering both a written and oral test will ensure that the presentation skills your club feels necessary are being utilized.

With a good founda-

tion of how to administer core competency training, let's turn to the content of the training. There are 8 major steps to selling health club memberships. These 8 steps provide a simple to understand, logical format and the sales training process should mirror these 8 steps. Let's take a look at each step and identify the tools utilized, hence the areas of needed training:

1. **Get A Prospect**
Tools utilized:
• Central appointment book
• Information call script
• Lead boxes
• Club referral programs (see step 7 for POS - Point of Sales info)
2. **Meet & Greet**
Tools utilized:
• Sign in process
• UPS System (how walk-in prospects are distributed)
• Pre-qualifying process (questions asked at the desk before sitting down with the Needs Analysis).
3. **Qualifying**
Tools utilized:
• Needs Analysis Sheet (established questions to uncover needs and wants)
4. **Touring**
(See Casey Conrad page 30)

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...Fitness First

continued from page 3

markets. In the growing world-wide fitness market, Fitness First is uniquely positioned to benefit from one of the most experienced management teams in the industry as well as from its large international portfolio and local know-how. Stefano

Quadrio Curzio, Managing Partner in BC Partners' London Office, said: "We are delighted to have completed this acquisition. With Fitness First, we have the opportunity to build on the international expansion and roll-out program with a proven and successful business model. The fitness industry will continue to grow, and we are very much

looking forward to backing Fitness First and its management team in playing a significant part in the future growth of this market. The management team at Fitness First, all true entrepreneurs, gives us a lot of comfort that we can develop this company into an even better business than it is today."

Colin Waggett, Chief

Operating and Financial Officer of Fitness First, added: "The company has a strong position in each of the major markets it is operating in. We are market leader in 10 of our 15 countries of operation and well positioned to take advantage of the excellent growth prospects in these markets. Fitness First will benefit from its unique combination

of its scale, local know-how, experienced management team and well developed multinational operating platform. In addition to significant scope for further growth in our existing markets there are exciting opportunities in new territories. We are delighted that BC Partners is backing the team to take Fitness First to the next level."

...Lyle Shuler

continued from page 18

painted a replica of a Fire House with a roof, a garage door, and interior and exterior art work. We have a photo of Mac with a fire hat on him about 4 feet wide and a life size painting of him in front of his dog house. It was all about making it *different*, making it *unique* and making it *fun*. We gave them a computer corner, an arts and crafts corner, a movie corner and a game corner along with an entire inside and outside appearance of a Fire House. The whole thing was just about making it fun, special, unique and not just having a typical 'holding cell' for parents to drop their kids off. Then, we hired somebody with child care background to program it properly and provide arts and crafts for holiday parties, birthday cards for Mom and Dad, etc. There is a lot to be said about doing a little something different.

Q. Lyle, tell us about your women's-only fitness center?

A. I haven't had a lot of experience with it and I haven't seen a lot of clubs in the country that do it right, but I know a lot of

clubs don't dedicate enough space to do it right. With the increase of Curves and other women's clubs, we've seen women actually come from some of the Curves clubs. They started getting bored with the Curves program, and they start getting interested in alternatives. We wanted to provide the space for women that we're trying to reach, people who may have not led an active lifestyle. They can come in and know they don't have to work out in front of everyone. Women can come in as beginners and feel safe and comfortable. People want to go where they feel safe and comfortable. They also want to be able to go where they KNOW they will get results. Those are the reasons we set aside and dedicated a 1,500 square foot space and decorated it nicely and equipped it well.

New Horizons Offer More for Club Members

Even though the MAC is now a big, well-equipped multi-purpose club, Schuler is not resting on his achievements to date. He is expanding and adding new products and services that will offer *new horizons*

for the club.

We asked Lyle Schuler to share information on some new developments he is currently working on for the MAC. Schuler commented, "#1 is that we've just acquired an additional 12,000 square feet of space, which was adjacent to our facility and had become available this past September. At the moment, we're still in the process of fine-tuning the programs and membership services, which we'll be offering in the new space. Currently, we're heavily considering the sports performance model, a sprint track and youth fitness programming along with basketball and field turf. The club industry in general has historically not served the youth market to a great extent, and we're hoping this will be one avenue to reach out and impact kids ages 7-17 in a spirit of athletic improvement, participation and fun. I did say *fun* didn't I?

Also, in development is our in-club physical therapy clinic, and it is scheduled to open this December, 2005. This approximately 2,000 square-foot clinic will be club-owned and operated. It will be located in the heart of our club with easy access to all fitness equipment areas. The process of hiring the right Physical Therapist and creating the right relationships with local physicians will be our challenge over the next several months. We are not renting space to a Physical Therapist. In a straight club rental of space, many times the tenant either feels they are paying too much rent or the landlord observes a successful business and feels he or she should have charged more rent. Then, over time, a 'them' and 'us' relationship develops, whereby both businesses do not work in harmony to the degree that the initial spirit of the agreement had intended. We intend to have the optimal cross-over benefit possible, but I'll have to keep you updated on that, Norm."

Q. Lyle, as we complete this wonderful interview, please share your thoughts on IHRSA and what it has meant to you and your career?

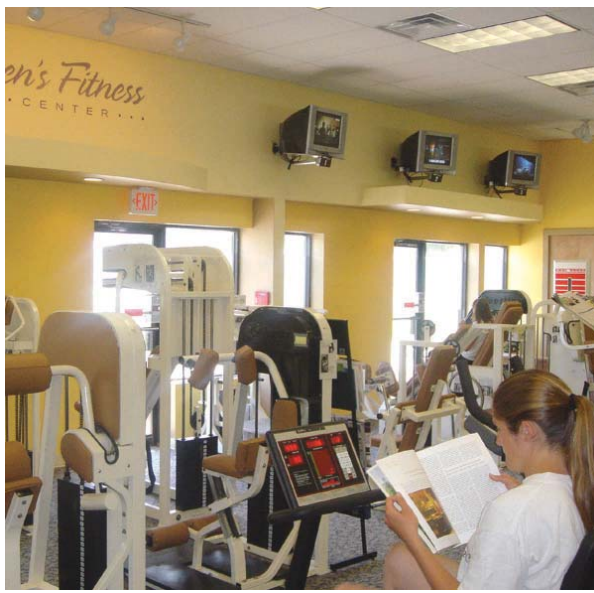
A. IHRSA has given so much to club owners and operators everywhere. We all owe IHRSA a huge debt of gratitude for helping our businesses grow. I don't think you will find anybody in this industry that would question the very important role IHRSA has had in maturing our industry and allowing club operators to learn from each other. It has been a huge learning resource and networking environment for club owners and operators. The educational conferences they've produced have helped reach many people in a very effective way. Not enough can be said about IHRSA, and not enough can be said for pioneers like yourself for having Co-founded IHRSA with Rick Caro and others and being the 1st President of IHRSA years ago. Then 12 years ago establishing CLUB INSIDER where people can count on reading every month about our industry. We all operate in different states, and we all have a need for information about what's happening, what's working and what's not working. For example, your two-part article on Low Cost Clubs and about the concerns and many challenges we face there. We face a lot of challenges from the non-profit sector too. There are a lot of operators who would not be aware of or be able to operate as effectively without the information and education that IHRSA, Club Insider and Club Industry provides for us.

Thanks Lyle. This interview has been very enjoyable for me and I've learned a lot from you. As I touch these last few keys for this fun report, I expect that a bunch of folks are going to have their eyes opened a little bit from reading this. By that I mean, I know of a bunch of people who are in our industry for one thing: money. You Lyle, are in our great business

surely to make a living, but through this in-depth interview with you, I see something genuine, real and truly beautiful. I see inside your heart the LOVE you have for our industry and the LOVE you have for your employees and your members. You TRULY are a *one of a kind guy!* And Lyle, you "**Make It Fun!**" That, in and of itself, is the *greatest blessing* you can give your members! **And, I still have that smile in my heart. Thanks.**

I wish you and your MAC Team and your good 'ol dog, Mac, the very best of health and success and happiness!

(Norm Cates, Jr. is the Founder and Publisher of CLUB INSIDER. Cates was the 1st President of IHRSA and a Co-founder of the Association in 1981. In March 2001, Cates was honored by IHRSA with its DALE DIBBLE Distinguished Service Award. Cates may be reached at: 770.850.8506 or by email: clubinsidernews@mindspring.com.)



MAC Women's Only Fitness Center

**MAKE
IT
FUN!**

...Casey Conrad

continued from page 28

Tools utilized:

- Feature-Benefit-Feedback Modules (pre-approved informational facts about the facility that engage the customer/prospect and elicit small commitments).
- Appropriate calendars, newsletters and brochures on the facility.

5. Price Presentation

Tools utilized:

- Rate Presentation Sheet
- Membership Packets

6. Overcome Objections

Tools utilized:

- Scripts for each of the major objections:
 - Think about it.
 - Money
 - Spouse
 - Time
 - Shop around
 - Commitment

7. POS Referrals

Tools utilized:

- Referral form
- Referral script
- Referral passes

8. Establish Contact

Tools utilized:

- Appointment book.

As one can see from the outline, many tools are necessary to successfully sell health club memberships. By following the training strategies we discussed in the earlier parts of this article-1) provide specific

training materials with books, tapes and videos, 2) role-play, 3) shadow and 4) test-new employees will be given the proper skills to sell and succeed. The key, of course, is to begin acquiring the necessary materials and begin implementing the training components, knowing that the creating of a successful training program doesn't happen overnight but builds gradually with each new employee. The end result will be more skilled employees, who are able to more successfully sell health

club memberships earlier in their career, resulting in a stronger sales team that stays with the club long-term.

(Casey Conrad is the Founder and President of Communications Consultants, Inc. and a long-time industry consultant. Casey is also the Founder and President of Healthy Inspirations, Inc. Casey may be reached at: (800) 725-6147 or by email at: casey@healthyinspirations.us)

...Will Phillips

continued from page 24

few committed clubs have the resources to truly explore the possibility of deep skin-to-skin

contact and alternatives to equipment. Most large clubs, with their demands for growth, go back to the traditional way of driving growth with a strong selling system so they can keep

the hopper full. This is not breakout thinking; it is just working really hard for modest returns.

(Will Phillips is the Founder of

REX Roundtables for Executives which operates twenty-one roundtables for business owners in five industries. Will is the Chair of seven roundtables for club owners. He may be reached

at: will@REXonline.org.)

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