

THE BOARDROOM

CELEBRATING 29 YEARS OF EDUCATING THE PRIVATE CLUB INDUSTRY

ISSUE 317 | VOLUME XXIX JANUARY/FEBRUARY



**Distinguished
Clubs** from
BOARDROOM
magazine

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
Forbes ★★
TRAVEL GUIDE

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION FOR THE
ASSOCIATION OF PRIVATE CLUB DIRECTORS

Distinguished President of the Year DAVID OXFORD, INTERLACHEN COUNTRY CLUB

10 | PUBLISHER'S PERSPECTIVE
WHO IS DRIVING YOUR CLUB'S DECISION MAKING?

86 | LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT
GREGG PATTERSON

90 | DISTINGUISHED CLUBS
MONTCLAIR GOLF CLUB
THE CLUB AT THE DUNES

94 | DISTINGUISHED GOLF DESTINATIONS
CLASSIC CLUB
THE OCEAN CLUB GOLF COURSE



80 | PGA FEATURE
PGA OF AMERICA SURPASSES 30,000 GOLF PROFESSIONAL SAYS
NEWLY ELECTED PRESIDENT DON REA JR.

PICTURED ABOVE: DAVID OXFORD, INTERLACHEN COUNTRY CLUB'S PRESIDENT

Interlachen Country Club's David Oxford Selected

BoardRoom's Distinguished Club President for 2024

"David Oxford's leadership has been invaluable to Interlachen's transformation over the last five years. His thinking around clubs and member experience, approach to governance, and support for our professional team and engagement with fellow members exemplify what it means to be a steward of an organization like Interlachen." – Joel Livingood, Interlachen's General Manager and CEO.

"Some boards want to run their clubs. Our board chooses to lead our club. There is a distinct difference: we spend our time talking about the brand, member experience, and strategies to drive engagement and investment. Put another way, as board members, few of us have experience running a restaurant or operating a golf course, so we choose to ask questions about what great looks like and what we can do to differentiate our club from the 16 others around us." – David Oxford, President, Interlachen Country Club.

These statements highlight the reasons why David Oxford has been selected as *BoardRoom's Distinguished President of the Year for 2024*.

BoardRoom magazine is again recognizing 22 Private Club Presidents of the Year 2024 for practicing what they preach: leadership for the betterment of their clubs as board presidents/chairs who serve as volunteer leaders.

This is the 17th year that *BoardRoom magazine* has recognized the industry's top private club presidents for their outstanding work. *BoardRoom* continues to attract nominations from clubs and nominators worldwide, which confirms that the recognition of the best club presidents is relevant and required. That's why *BoardRoom magazine* initiated this award many years ago.

"Our selection of the top 22 presidents and David Oxford as our *Distinguished Club President* signifies another successful search for leaders who have contributed so much to their private clubs and their member experience," expressed John Fornaro, the *BoardRoom magazine's* publisher and CEO.

"Helping their club define objectives, establish major goals, stay focused on its direction over time, and hire a CEO/GM are what we consider when making our decisions," Fornaro added.

This award is based strictly on the time the board president served in 2024.

"Our goal with this award has always been to reduce micromanaging by the board of directors, show respect for the GM and recognize boards that have dealt with serious challenges, led major transformations, or maintained a successful status quo," Fornaro added.

The basic requirements for being recognized as a top president board president are:

- Determining club mission and purpose
- Keeping, hiring or firing the CEO/COO/GM
- Reducing micromanaging of the CEO/COO/GM and staff while promoting collaborative governance
- Providing support for the CEO/COO/GM
- Financial oversight, and
- Ensuring legal and ethical integrity and maintaining accountability
- Ensuring that every board member participates, but no one dominates, and
- Board members supporting the president. ➤



*Distinguished
President*

PICTURED: DAVID OXFORD, INTERLACHEN COUNTRY CLUB'S PRESIDENT



Pictured L-R: Joel Livingood, Interlachen's GM and CEO; David Oxford, Interlachen's president

"In addition, we examine the situations the board president inherited. We then examine their role in fixing current club challenges or maintaining a club's success if it has no issues. We also look at how they set the club up for success in the future.

"And our thanks to Kopplin, Kuebler & Wallace for their continued sponsorship and support over the past years. As one of the country's leading private club industry consultants and executive search firms, KK&W is immersed in the private club industry. They understand the importance of a qualified, informed, and collaborative board president for a club," Fornaro added.

The *Association of Private Club Directors*, the parent organization of *BoardRoom* magazine and Kopplin Kuebler & Wallace, involved in the program from day one, have provided the impetus for *BoardRoom's* top president recognition program.

"We nominated David Oxford for *Distinguished President of the Year 2024* because of his outstanding leadership and vision during his tenure at Interlachen Country Club. The main point is how progressive the club is and how it is a North Star for how great clubs will need to operate in the future," said the KK&W partners, Dick Kopplin, Kurt Kuebler, and Tom Wallace.

"David's approach to leadership exemplifies the ideal partnership between a club president and a general manager/CEO. His unwavering support and empowerment of the club's GM/CEO, fellow board members and committees have set a high standard for collaborative governance.

"Under David's leadership, Interlachen Country Club has become a premier example of excellence in private club governance, strategic planning, operations, and capital investment strategy. These efforts have resulted in a physical plant that is unparalleled in the Midwest.

"The club is widely recognized as an employer of choice, offering a workplace culture and environment that attract and retain top talent. This commitment to people, combined with David's foresight, has enabled the club to deliver amenities, experiences, and overall satisfaction that consistently exceed expectations and set a benchmark for peer clubs," added the trio.

"David has cultivated an environment where teamwork thrives and inspires others to push boundaries. He has guided the board and committees to achieve extraordinary results during favorable conditions, ensuring the club is prepared with resilience and strong foundations to navigate future challenges. By focusing on long-term strategy and aligning leadership efforts, David has positioned Interlachen Country Club for a vibrant and prosperous future.

"This nomination celebrates David's ability to lead as an individual and leadership and commitment to good governance. His example reminds us that any club's success lies in its ability to harness the collective talent, vision, and energy of its entire leadership team," they said.

COMMON ATTRIBUTES

"It seems that top clubs have a few things in common: a clear identity and positioning on which they focus, a strong financial position that allows for ongoing investment, a level of hospitality and service that consistently meets or exceeds expectations, a highly capable professional team that delivers results, and an engaged membership that support the club," responded President Oxford.

"We believe that governance is forward-looking. It's about creating a process for making good decisions for our club's future. At Interlachen, our board of directors is highly focused on how to continue to deliver on the club's mission over the next decade and beyond. We ensure the structure, funding, policy, and planning support our club's collective, long-term interests. We don't manage the club; we ensure it is well-managed.

"I cannot speak highly enough of my fellow board members. It is a group of leaders who put the club's interests above their own. Each strives to look at decision-making through the lens of we and us versus me and I—easier said than done," Oxford added.

"I believe boards should complement the management team. Over the last several years, Interlachen has shifted from operational to strategic governance. Led by a strong partnership with our general manager and CEO and a mutual understanding of expectations and accountability for results, we have created an environment where our professional staff can do their best work, and our board can have the biggest impact," Oxford opined.

"Being a champion for the club's mission and purpose, supporting the role of the CEO/COO/GM, promoting good, collaborative governance, providing sound financial oversight, ensuring legal and ethical integrity, maintaining accountability and engaging all board members are points central to how we think about governance and I think our industry misses that sometimes," expressed Livingood.

"Like many clubs, Interlachen faced a challenging mid-teens golf environment. The club fell behind in critical areas because of a shrinking membership and limited forward-looking investments, leading to significant deferred capital. In many ways, the lack of investment contributed to our lack of demand," he added.

STRATEGY DEFINED

In 2017, David was serving on the Finance Committee, where he was highly engaged in a collaborative effort with Livingood and the board of directors to rally the membership around a strategy to:

1. Deliver best-in-class hospitality
2. Create a top workplace
3. Strengthen the club's financial position
4. Establish best-practice governance
5. Bring championship golf back to Interlachen

"In 2021, David took center stage to champion a major part of the strategy: a \$30 million master plan to restore the golf course and expand the casual dining, fitness, and racquet facilities," explained Livingood.

"The project costs increased significantly from the time the project was approved to construction, requiring a second vote of support from the membership. David's leadership of the board, engagement with members from large town hall meetings to countless one-on-one conversations and commitment to Interlachen's mission, values, and strategy were essential to the project's success.

"He also championed the investment in the people and operating resources necessary for Interlachen's team to deliver a best-in-class experience and be a great workplace. Today, the results speak for themselves, notably a several-year-long golf waitlist, record engagement across all areas of the club and a high satisfaction across our team," Livingood added.

GOVERNANCE COMMITMENT

A commitment to good governance has been a cornerstone of David's three-year tenure as president, a first in Interlachen's 115-year history.

"He has helped the club get the right people involved through a well-defined nominating process and thoughtful succession planning. He ensured the board is equipped with the proper resources from a robust orientation and ongoing, fact-based education on the private club business model and Interlachen's mission and performance. He has kept the board focused on what matters – the mission, values, strategy, financial condition, long-term capital needs and executive development," Livingood stated.

"Put another way, effective boards understand the difference between governing and managing. Interlachen's board considers some key questions when determining if issues rise to the level of the board of directors:

- Is it big?
- Is it about the future?
- Is it core to the club's mission?
- Is a high-level policy decision needed to resolve a situation or improve the member experience?
- Is a red flag flying?

EXPANDED FACILITIES

Interlachen, founded in 1909, has long been a top 100 golf course and neighborhood club in Edina, a first-ring suburb of Minneapolis. The membership comprises 850 families, most living within three miles of the club.

The club has hosted nine national golf championships, including the 1930 U.S. Open and the 2008 U.S. Women's Open, which will return in 2030. Andrew Green recently led a complete renovation to restore the course to its original Donald Ross design. The 2024 Fried Egg Golf Awards recognized it as the Most Improved, and *Golf Magazine* recently ranked Interlachen 73rd on its list of Top 100 Courses in the U.S. for 2024-2025.

In addition to the golf course, the club, since 2018, has invested over \$50 million improving and expanding its other facilities. This includes renovating the original clubhouse, which dates back to 1911 and building 43,000 square feet of new construction for fitness, racquet sports and a casual restaurant.

All good reasons why David Oxford has been selected *BoardRoom's Distinguished President of the Year for 2024*. **BR**

David Oxford A Longtime Member Of Interlachen Country Club

David Oxford, *BoardRoom's Distinguished President of the Year for 2024*, and his wife, Kari, joined Edina, Minnesota's Interlachen Country Club in 2007. Before taking on the role of president, he served on the club's finance committee, including two years as chair.

He is a senior executive at Game-Mill Publishing, an Edina-based software company with corporate partnerships, including the PGA Tour, Paramount Global, Mattel, and many more. From 2000 to 2016, David was the executive vice president and general manager at Activision, where he led strategic and operational efforts of the more than \$4 billion software publisher around the globe.

David previously served on the board of trustees at the Blake School and is currently a board member of the Spring Hill Golf Club. He earned his degree in economics from the University of North Dakota. David and Kari have three children: Elise, Ava, and Harry.

"David has led Interlachen through a particularly transformative time. His approach has been to build consensus at the board level and with the membership, to adhere to the club's mission, vision and values, and to support a strong management team and allow them to do what they do best. As a result, the club has made critical, strategic investments in the club's infrastructure that has meaningfully enhanced the member experience and will pay dividends for years to come."

Brett Habstritt, Treasurer/Finance Committee Chair

"David Oxford has the best leadership skills of anyone that I have ever met. I am constantly impressed by his decisive analysis and communication of complex administrative issues."

John Strickler, Vice President/Golf Committee Chair



Pictured L-R: David Oxford, President; Andrew Green, Golf Course Architect; Brett Habstritt, Treasurer/Finance Committee Chair; Brian Boll, Director of Golf Course and Grounds; Joel Livingood, GM and CEO; and Nathan Ollhoff, Director of Golf

2024 Top Private Club Presidents & Board Chairs of the Year

BoardRoom magazine for the 17th year, is recognizing 22 presidents as *2024 Top Private Club Presidents of the Year* for practicing what they preach – leadership for the betterment of their clubs.

Private club board presidents play a huge role in the professional operations of their club as volunteers working diligently with their board of directors and general managers, striving for well informed, but not emotional decisions.

BoardRoom magazine's 21 most outstanding private club presidents for 2024, plus the selection of David Oxford, president of Interlachen Country Club as the *BoardRoom Distinguished President for 2024*, exemplifies the focus on the leadership responsibilities, the accountability and the management of the board, while providing a healthy respect for the club's macromanagement.

"This kind of recognition for volunteers who give so much to the club has been long overdue, and since the first awards were presented 16 years ago, there's been a steady growth in the nominations by club general managers and others in the private club industry," expressed *BoardRoom* publisher John Fornaro.

These board presidents understand the importance of working, effectively and efficiently, with their volunteer boards and the dedication that's required from everyone with whom they work.

They practice what they preach – outstanding leadership to maintain best practices and an extraordinary member experience for their members clubs.

Systems alone do not insure a good board. Key elements include commitment, competence, diversity, collective decision making, openness, transparency, effective communication with management and the membership, fiscal responsibility, development and establishment of the club's mission, vision and policy direction, especially through establishment of a strategic plan.

Successful board presidents draw upon the expertise of other board members, the club's institutional memory and stewardship of the club's resources. As well, board presidents provide new board members and future presidents with information they need to perform effectively as board members.

Congratulations to BoardRoom's outstanding private club board presidents and chairs for 2024.

David Oxford (Distinguished President of the Year)	Interlachen Country Club
Jeanine Banks	Boca West Country Club
Jackson Bender	Piedmont Driving Club
Christopher Burgess	The American Club Hong Kong
Christine DeVita	Governors Club
Rick Fernandes	Grey Oaks Country Club
Shari Forman	White Eagle Golf Club
David Frank	BallenIsles Country Club
Cyndy Gilchrest	The Venice Golf and Country Club
Gary Lapidus	Wyndemere Country Club
Jim Manley	Idle Hour Club
Ken Marous	Shoreby Club
Kevin Martin	Newport Beach Country Club
Kevin McFarlane	Jonathon Club
Susie Mumford	The Francisca Club
Trey Penny	Colonial Country Club
Jeff Smith	Desert Mountain Club
Dwight Stone (Current President)	Grandfather Golf and Country Club
Marilyn Suey Diamond	Blackhawk Country Club
Miller Williams (Past President)	Grandfather Golf and Country Club
Rob Warren	Mission Viejo Country Club
Dennis Whalen	Royal Oaks Country Club

Private Club Presidents of the Year Major Sponsors

