

# THE BOARDROOM

CELEBRATING 28 YEARS OF EDUCATING THE PRIVATE CLUB INDUSTRY

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*Distinguished President of the Year*

Vito P. Gioia II  
Detroit Athletic Club

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PICTURED L-R: VITO P. GIOIA II DETROIT ATHLETIC CLUB'S PRESIDENT  
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# Detroit Athletic Club's Vito P. Gioia II Selected BoardRoom's Distinguished Club President for 2023

Vito P. Gioia II, the 106th president of the Detroit Athletic Club, has been fascinated with numbers, a drive to succeed and a way with people since childhood. These traits have guided him to give everything he has in the moment, take pride in his work and reserve his time for the things he loves most.

And that's typical of how Vito Gioia, *BoardRoom magazine's Distinguished Club President for 2023*, has engaged himself in his activities at the Detroit Athletic Club.

Since 2005, Gioia's tireless energy has shone in the committee room and beyond. Most notably, he served 10 years on the DAC's finance committee, including as its chair and club treasurer. His work on the strategic planning, executive and house committees guided the DAC as it emerged from the challenges of 2020.

*BoardRoom magazine* this year is recognizing 21 *Private Club Presidents of the Year - 2023* for practicing what they preach - leadership for the betterment of their clubs as board presidents or chairs who serve as the volunteer leaders of their club.

It's the 16th year *BoardRoom magazine* has recognized the industry's top private club presidents for their outstanding work. *BoardRoom* continues to attract board president nominations from clubs and nominators from around the world, which confirms that the recognition of the best club presidents is relevant and required. That's the reason why *BoardRoom magazine* initiated this award many years ago.

"Our selection of the top 20 presidents and Vito Gioia, president of the Detroit Athletic Club, 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.

"Congratulations to all our board presidents of the year and Vito Gioia for his efforts to become our *2023 Distinguished Club President*. With over 400 applications, many of them have had success. It's been a challenge this year to get that number down to 21.

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



*Distinguished  
President*

PICTURED L-R: VITO P. GIOIA II DETROIT ATHLETIC CLUB'S PRESIDENT AND CHARLES JOHNSON, DETROIT ATHLETIC CLUB'S EXECUTIVE MANAGER AND CEO

“At our board orientation, we emphasize stewardship of three main areas: long-term strategic vision, operational oversight and governance. We encourage our directors and members to be curious, not judgmental – especially when it comes to the often-counterintuitive nature of the hospitality industry.

“Over time, we have found that the most effective directors have a mentor or ‘board buddy’ to coach them through the early years and complex matters in front of the board. I believe in turning common sense into common practice, so this year, we thoughtfully assigned mentors to directors in their first and second years to ensure engagement and understanding.”

*Vito P. Gioia II, president, Detroit Athletic Club*

“Also, the board president working hand in hand with CEO/GM, collaborative governance and not micromanaging them is the most critical. I’ve seen one lousy board president take a club back many years because of their poor leadership.

“In the future, we will be adding the board president’s role in education and informing new committee members as part of our criteria. It should be a priority of every CEO/GM and board president to prepare them for future board positions,” Fornaro stressed.

“A 2019 survey showed that fewer than three percent of board members had previous experience with 501(c)7 or (c)3 organizations. Ninety percent of private clubs are equity clubs and the vast majority are 501(c)7 or (c)3 organizations. There are many differences, such as fiduciary and legal issues, ongoing compliance obligations, and management oversight, to name a few.

“And congratulations to Kopplin Kuebler & Wallace for their continued sponsorship and support over the past 20 years. Immersed in the private club industry, they understand the importance of a qualified, informed and collaborative board president to a club,” Fornaro added.

The impetus for *BoardRoom’s Top President* recognition program comes from the *Association of Private Club Directors*, the parent organization of *Boardroom* magazine and Kopplin Kuebler & Wallace, one of the country’s leading private club industry consultants and executive search firms.

“With over 27 years of fostering relationships with club board members, particularly club presidents, we continue to be inspired by their steadfast dedication to the prosperity of their clubs,” commented Dick Kopplin, Kurt Kuebler and Tom Wallace, partners in KK&W.

“Their relentless focus on implementing robust governance practices and cultivating a culture of stewardship reflects a commitment that should be recognized and shared for the success of the private club industry.”

“Achieving a board culture of strong and regarded leadership is truly impressive. We continue to look forward to supporting *BoardRoom* magazine in acknowledging these volunteer leaders for their commitment to their private clubs. We also recognize the stable work environment these leaders uphold for their management teams and staff,” the trio added.

“Vito Gioia stands as an exemplary leader, renowned for his strategic acumen and unwavering commitment to fostering an environment of trust and respect. Gioia’s visionary leadership has cultivated a management team that operates with seamless efficiency and undeniable morale,” explained Ron Banaszak, Executive Vice President, International Business Development, *BoardRoom Distinguished Clubs*, who nominated Gioia as *BoardRoom Distinguished Club President for 2023*.

“Under his guidance, the club has become a beacon of excellence, not only in its athletic pursuit but also in providing unparalleled service to its esteemed members.

“Gioia’s strategic initiatives extend beyond operational prowess. He ensures the management team is empowered with the resources needed for operational success. His adept stewardship has led the board to allocate ample funds, ensuring the facility’s pristine upkeep and creating an ambiance of sophistication and cleanliness.

“Vito Gioia’s presidency is marked by a harmonious blend of strategic foresight and a genuine dedication to exceptional member satisfaction, solidifying the Detroit Athletic Club’s position as a paragon of sporting and social excellence,” Banaszak added.

“The Detroit Athletic Club Board of Directors is unique in a few ways,” expressed President Gioia.

“We currently have an 18-person board comprised of directors serving two, three-year terms and we continue to celebrate a century-plus tradition of popular elections. Our month-long election season is held in January, culminating in another tradition: election day and our annual meeting. ➤

“At our board orientation, we emphasize stewardship of three main areas: long-term strategic vision, operational oversight and governance. We encourage our directors and members to be curious, not judgmental – especially when it comes to the often-counterintuitive nature of the hospitality industry.

“Over time, we have found that the most effective directors have a mentor or ‘board buddy’ to coach them through the early years and complex matters in front of the board. I believe in turning common sense into common practice, so this year, we thoughtfully assigned mentors to directors in their first and second years to ensure engagement and understanding,” Gioia added.

“We also encourage directors to spend time with each other outside of the boardroom and find ways to engage spouses at events and our annual strategic summit. Creating a collegial foundation has been a high priority.

“While we take our role on the board seriously, we do our best to remember we are members, too. We love to have fun and enjoy our club like our thousands of fellow members,” he enthused.

“With surpassing pride and on behalf of our board, I also would like to recognize and thank the DAC staff led by our Executive Manager and CEO, Charles Johnson. Our DAC team is amazing, committed, and tireless in delivering a world-class member experience every day,” Gioia remarked.

“President Gioia effectively maintained alignment of club, board, committee, and management team goals through the strategic plan. They all support, in some way, objectives outlined in our strategic plan,” expressed Executive Manager Johnson. “This ensures that everyone in governance and management works on corresponding items and strives to achieve the same collective goals.

“Micromanagement has not been an issue at the DAC. Like many clubs, we’ve been conscious of that in recent years and intentional with our efforts to avoid it. President Gioia does a great job keeping the board’s focus strategic and not operational. During board meetings, he is quick to redirect any discussions that stray from our strategic focus,” Johnson added.

So, how does the club handle the growth of its board of directors?

“We have annual board retreats that focus on strategy, industry education, and camaraderie. The executive committee works with the executive manager to develop each retreat’s agenda, topics and supplemental materials.

“Ongoing education for the board is a point of emphasis for us. It begins with the annual board orientation, which is attended by all board members, not just the new ones. We’re also very conscious of including an educational component for each board meeting, tapping into the expertise of our management team and other industry experts,” Johnson explained. ➤

## Varied Career Focus For Vito Gioia

Vito Gioia, President of the Detroit Athletic Club and BoardRoom’s Distinguished Club President for 2023 has focused his career on wealth management, business succession and exit planning, philanthropy, and strategy.

For over 25 years, Vito has consulted with successful business owners from myriad industries about estate and tax planning, succession and exit planning, asset allocation, lending, banking and philanthropy.

As a fiduciary, he skillfully helps clients navigate some of the most complicated family/business partnership matters by balancing the science of finance with the art of consensus building, diplomacy, and a great sense of humor.

Vito is a passionate thought leader in corporate and not-for-profit governance, change management, and strategy.

He enjoys many DAC activities, but his first love is bowling. He embraces every opportunity to compete and knows that winning against the best is the highest honor for a DAC bowler. Gioia’s passion evolved into leadership as he rose to general bowling chair.

Gioia is the managing partner of Solyco Wealth in Birmingham, Michigan. He previously was Michigan market manager at Key Private Bank, a wealth management adviser at Fifth Third Bank and a commercial banker at NBD Bank/Bank One.

After graduating with a BA in Finance from Michigan State’s Eli Broad College of Business, Gioia earned an MBA in Strategy from Michigan’s Stephen M. Ross School of Business. He also sits on the Multicultural Business Program advisory board at Michigan State University and the Ernest S. Betts Endowment.

Gioia and his wife Heather share (in differing order and degree) a love of travel, bourbon, music, bowling, baseball, and great food. They are humbled daily by their three precocious children. They reside in West Bloomfield, MI. **BR**



“President Gioia has been very thoughtful about what education is needed and may be helpful about the strategic-plan initiatives we are working on. He finds ways to incorporate that education into board meetings and other materials relevant to the directors. Gioia has also advocated and supported professional development for the club’s management team.

“Perpetual growth and education are critical for any high-functioning team. It engages our high performers, as well as those seeking to improve. As the DAC strives for continued excellence, we’re always pushing to improve the management team and the board. Naturally, professional and personal development is a huge part of that,” expounded Johnson.

“Throughout his tenure, Vito has consistently demonstrated his ability to foster a collaborative and inclusive environment. He actively encourages diverse perspectives and ensures that all board members have an equal opportunity to contribute their ideas and expertise. This has improved our effectiveness as a board and resulted in well-informed decision-making,” articulated DAC’s first vice president, Derron Sanders.

“He also exhibits exceptional teamwork skills and readily engages with board members, staff and stakeholders, valuing their unique talents and opinions. His willingness to listen and provide constructive feedback has ➤

## President Vito P. Gioia’s Accomplishments

- Led effort to modernize board election process and policies without diminishing tradition
- Presided over a first-year implementation of the five-year strategic plan
- Contributed to the development and finalization of the club’s strategic plan in earlier years as a board member
- Drove preparation and communication for 2024 capital projects (main kitchen and overnight room renovations)
- Assigned mentors to board members in their first and second years.
- Established clarity
- After years of education and deliberation, Vito led the board through bylaw and governance changes that better align with best practices, showing courage to do so in the face of adversity.

## The Detroit Athletic Club A Club With A Storied History

Many organizations have graced the pages of Detroit’s history, but few have impacted the community as much as the Detroit Athletic Club.

Like a boulder in the midstream of a river, the DAC has shaped more than 100 years of Detroit history since its establishment in 1887.

The original club, founded by a group of privileged young men under the spell of amateur athletics sweeping the country at the time, was later reborn in 1913 by a group of the city’s prominent automotive and industrial leaders.

They reorganized the DAC and commissioned famed architect Albert Kahn to design the magnificent six-story clubhouse that today stands in the center of the city’s theatre and sports district.

The original DAC clubhouse, which no longer exists, was located just south of the cultural heart of Detroit along Woodward Avenue. That first facility was designed primarily as an athletic center with a cinder running track, baseball diamonds, bowling alleys and later, a full gymnasium.

Many of the original club members later were instrumental in creating the current version of the Detroit Athletic Club.

As the 19th century rolled into the 20th, the DAC fell on hard times – many of its young members, some of whom went off to fight in the Spanish-American War, began to lose interest in amateur sports and focused instead on business development and the growing automobile industry.

The first club nearly closed, save for the efforts of John Kelsey, who personally funded it for several years.

When the new clubhouse opened in April 1915, it marked the culmination of the careful plans and dreams of more than 100 prominent Detroiters, many of whom were automotive pioneers.

Names like Chalmers, Jewett, Kelsey, Joy, Lodge, Metzger, Hughes, Navin and Scripps will forever be associated with the club’s 20th century rebirth and its place as a home to industrial titans.

Traditionally, the new DAC was born on January 4, 1913, when 109 leading citizens of Detroit met at the Pontchartrain Hotel to sign articles of association and organize a framework of committees to start the club on its way to becoming the vaunted iteration it is today. **BR**

strengthened relationships within the organization and fostered more trust and camaraderie.

“President Gioia consistently demonstrates foresight and strategic thinking, driving the DAC towards ambitious goals with a visionary leadership style. His ability to anticipate future challenges and opportunities has been instrumental in positioning us to remain the No. 1 Athletic Club in the country and one of the best private clubs in the world.

“It has been an honor and a privilege to serve under Mr. Gioia’s leadership. His invaluable contributions as the board chair of the DAC will have a positive and profound impact for years to come,” Sanders commented.

“Mr. Gioia is an exceptional governance leader dedicated to our members and our club’s future. He doesn’t focus on short-term challenges; he leaves that to our capable management team. Vito has always been and continues to be a thoughtful listener and consensus builder while leading the DAC forward,” expressed Lorna Utley, a board member and corporate secretary.

And we leave the last words to President Gioia.

“When asked if a one-year term as president is long enough, I offer this: when you collectively commit to a long-term strategic plan, a one-year presidential term gives the board the right amount of urgency to get things done. Plus, I would want as many people as possible to serve as president of this amazing club,” Gioia added.

“My term on the board has been the best leadership experience of my career. I’ve made many great friends who have created stories for the ages. Whenever I’m given a microphone, I reiterate this in hopes that we continue recruiting the best leaders in Detroit to lead our club.

“Individual accolades are humbling and they are only made possible by the efforts of the whole,” President Gioia concluded, and the so many reasons why President Vito Gioia is *BoardRoom’s Distinguished Club President for 2023*. BR



# 2023 Top Private Club Presidents & Board Chairs of the Year

*BoardRoom* magazine for the 16th year, is recognizing 21 presidents as *Private Club Presidents of the Year – 2023* 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 20 most outstanding private club presidents for 2023, plus the selection of Vito P. Gioia II, President of Detroit Athletic Club in Detroit, MI as the *BoardRoom Distinguished President for 2023*, 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 2023.

Vito P. Gioia II (Distinguished President of the Year)	Detroit Athletic Club
Margaret (Liza) Barrett Emmet	Florida Yacht Club
Michael Carr	Detroit Golf Club
James Doehring	Edgewood Valley Country Club
William Doyle	Westwood Country Club
Justin Foley	Exmoor Country Club
Bill Hamel	Carmel Country Club
Michael Hartrick	The Toronto Lawn Tennis Club
Ed Kelly	TPC Treviso Bay Golf Club
Thomas Kruger	Grand Harbor
Steve Kunkle	Tualatin Country Club
Daniel P. Magee	Yacht Club of Stone Harbor
Joe V. McCart	The Club at Admirals Cove
Allison Mitchell	Huntington Country Club
Matthew M. Rankin	Greensboro Country Club
Michael Rappaport	Hunters Run Country Club
Ira M. Schwartz	Naples Lakes Country Club
Christopher Shirling	Indian Hills Country Club
Keith Wandell	Colleton River Club
Craig Welch III	Kent Country Club
Rob Williams	Winged Foot Golf Club

### Private Club Presidents of the Year Major Sponsors

