

# South Africa's Arthur Coy Honored As BoardRoom magazine's Distinguished Club President

By Dave White, editor

Private Club Presidents of the Year major sponsor: Kopplin & Kuebler

*Reinvigorating: 'To give new life or energy to...or put vitality or vigor back into (something or someone).'*"

For the 106 year-old Country Club of Johannesburg, "reinvigorating" is much more than a dictionary meaning, and there's a breath of fresh air sweeping through the club, which historically has been adverse to change.

Any form of concern or complaint fell on deaf ears as the autocratic, non-inclusive style of management, continued relentlessly as the committee and chair micromanaged every aspect of the club's operations.

"The old style of being neither accessible nor approachable has finally left the building," commented one wag.

And the big push behind all the change is Arthur Coy, chairman of the CCJ's main committee, and *BoardRoom magazine's Distinguished Private Club President for 2011*.

BoardRoom, for the fourth year, is recognizing 20 club presidents as the top Private Club Presidents of the Year – 2011, for practicing what they preach – leadership for the betterment of their clubs...board presidents, commodores or chairs who have served as the volunteer leaders of their club.

John Fornaro, publisher of BoardRoom, and CEO of the Association of Private Clubs and Directors, said Coy is being recognized as the *Distinguished Club President*, and one of the top 20 Private Club Presidents from the worldwide nominations.

"Kurt and I are very enthused about the *Club President of the Year* program that has been created and developed by *BoardRoom magazine*," commented Richard Kopplin, a partner with Kopplin & Kuebler LLC. The firm, with principals Richard Kopplin and Kurt Kuebler, for the fourth straight year is one of the major supporters of this BoardRoom endeavor.

"We have often honored club general managers and other employees in the private club world but this is the first effort to recognize club members who give so much of their time

for the betterment of their clubs by serving as their club president. We say it's about time that these volunteer club presidents, who give generously of their personal time, receive some accolades for the work that they do to benefit their fellow club members," Kopplin added.

"In our travels around the country and with visits to over 175 clubs each year, Dick and I get to see 'the good, the bad and the highly dysfunctional' of club governance," explained Kuebler.

"While we're primarily in the executive search business, and therefore talking about paid executive staff most times, we recognize that no matter how good the top club executive is, they cannot be successful without similarly strong, focused, consistent and objectives-driven (versus agenda-driven) leadership from the volunteer club president, commodore or chairperson.

"We're thrilled to see that there is a direct correlation with those types of characteristics being present in the vast majority of those folks in volunteer leadership roles at the highest performing clubs we visit...and that many of them are represented in your selections for Club President of Year," he added.

"Congratulations again for recognizing those club leaders who do the right things on behalf of their clubs," Kuebler concluded.

"This is an extremely exciting story in the private club industry," enthused Fornaro. "This recognition program has continued to grow and this year there were nominations from countries all over the world. It's very important that BoardRoom do its part in supporting club presidents.

"It's a great achievement for Arthur Coy," Fornaro opined. "It's the first time a South African president is being recognized as the Distinguished President for his contributions to his club, and making the club a better place for its members.

SEE COVER STORY - PAGE 22

# *Distinguished President*



**Standing; Ann Robbie, CEO, the Country Club of Johannesburg  
Seated; Arthur Coy, president, the Country Club of Johannesburg**



“Boards have a very definitive role in the life of a private club, and it’s important this role clarification be passed on down the line to incoming presidents,” Fornaro added.

Nominations of the candidates have been reviewed by BoardRoom’s industry experts who have an understanding of the industry, the structure of the board of directors, and the role and responsibilities of the club’s board of directors, including the macromanagement of the club, which clearly defines the role and responsibilities of the club’s management as its chief executive.

The story for Coy really begins in July 2010 with his selection as chairman of the CCJ’s Main Committee (the term CCJ uses for board of directors), and two major issues (of course, there were other issues) he faced.

“The club needed reinvigoration...renewal,” Coy explained. The CCJ, with its 7,000 plus members, remained stuck in a time warp.

“The previous manager has been with us for a long while and did not introduce any new ideas of concepts toward the end of his term...something fairly normal for people moving into retirement.

“We needed to replace our manager and at the same time, I had a view that the future of our club lay in getting new younger members, so the new manager would need to play a major role in making the club attractive to the younger set,” Coy exclaimed.

Enter Ann Robbie...CEO, the Country Club of Johannesburg, and Coy’s selection to help drive the club into the future.

“The club is 106 years old and exists to a large degree on tradition and this is reflected in the age and nature of the members,” Coy added.

“The future of the club is through the younger members as they will eventually become the backbone of the club. A strong base of membership is vital ... and

Ann has been encouraged to make the club more of a destination for younger members. It is still early days but we are moving in this direction.

“Clubs, worldwide, are struggling to remain relevant to their membership. The way people use their spare time has changed substantially. Our vision would be to try and influence the decisions our members make so that the club becomes an important part of their way of life,” Coy stressed.

“We have just implemented what we believe is the best possible solution for the future and communicated as best as possible. I think all clubs have professional ‘niggers’ (petty complainers), but we have not had any real opposition to what we are doing,” Coy emphasized.

So change has been the thrust for the club’s CEO Ann Robbie.

“Arthur has a friendly, open manner and invites all members to air their views and concerns,” Robbie outlined in her nomination of Coy as a top president. “He believes strongly that the main committee sets club policy and guidelines and that the management must manage the club. A number of changes have been implemented in order that CCJ could successfully embark on this style of management.

“He’s always available to listen and to guide, is a popular member and enthusiastic. He doesn’t impose his will, but listens to all opinions and reaches consensus with the committee. And he supports the development of key managers.

“Members of the main committee have openly supported Arthur and committed themselves not to micro-manage or undermine management...but rather support and guide when necessary,” Robbie explained.

The result is, there is no longer any space within the committee for the pursuit of individual personal goals, often the reason why club members become committee members.



**BOARDROOM MAGAZINE 2010 DISTINGUISHED CLUB PRESIDENT WINNERS  
JOHN RYDELL AND BRUCE CARSON RECEIVING THEIR AWARD.**

Pictured L-R: Dick Kopplin, Kopplin & Kuebler; John Rydell, president, Mission Viejo Country Club; Brad Shupe, GM Mission Viejo Country Club; Bruce Carson, president, Mission Viejo Country Club; Adrian Johnson, CEO Elan General Contracting

“Arthur’s transparency and clear leadership has also resulted in committee meetings being constructive, positive events where committee members voice their often divergent opinions but where there are no personal attacks,” CEO Robbie commented.

“Difficult issues are often discussed between committee members before meetings so that there is a greater understanding at the meetings. There is a high level of trust between committee members themselves and the executive management.

“Everyone is pulling in the same direction – to be the best in each and every way together,” she emphasized.

“I was appointed the new chief executive officer with a clear mandate to ensure that the club be managed professionally as a business. Member satisfaction and value is a key long term requirement.

“Service excellence and the quality of all offerings are to reflect the club’s stature and member belief that CCJ is the best club in Africa, if not the world!”

The chairman and committee also broke with tradition in appointing a woman to this position – one of the very few such appointments in South Africa.

Coy clearly supports the development of key managers. CEO Robbie is the chair of the Club Management Association of South Africa, and is supported in attending international and local conferences.

“This policy of continued development and learning is core to the executive team and all staff. CCJ has implemented and completed three years of a four-year training program for food and beverage staff funded entirely by the club for the development of our human capital,” Robbie explained.

“Arthur Coy has supported the drive to include younger members (the future of the club). To this end a Sundowner evening is hosted by the club each month where only members and their guests between the ages of 23 and 35 are invited,” Robbi explained.

**SEE COVER STORY - PAGE 135**

## The Country Club Johannesburg

In more than a century since The Country Club was opened in 1906 by the town’s then mayor, William Kidger Tucker, it has enhanced its reputation as an institution admired worldwide for its social, recreational and sporting amenities.

The CCJ facilities are unsurpassed anywhere in the country –with two venues: Auckland Park and Woodmead, about 20km apart. The club is lauded for its unique garden settings, magnificent banqueting venues, quality restaurants and lounge, luxury accommodation and childrens’ playgrounds.

There are two championship golf courses, fully equipped gymnasiums, squash courts, tennis courts, a cricket field, bowling greens, croquet lawns as well as magnificent clubhouses (including extensive banqueting facilities), children’s play areas and grounds. In addition, there is accommodation for members and guests at Auckland Park (18 rooms).

The use of these noble landmarks is enjoyed by members throughout the year, and the tall imposing oak trees stand as monuments to an establishment rooted in the heritage of Johannesburg.

The club strives to provide the highest level of quality, personal service and recognition with a commitment to continual improvement through empowered, well trained personnel.

### Club membership details

Juniors aged 16-25 years . . . . .	322
Full members aged 26-30 years. . . . .	310
Full members aged 31-63 years. . . . .	2190
Spouse/partner members. . . . .	922
Senior members (over 63 years old) . . . . .	1044
Life members . . . . .	531
Out of town members. . . . .	1630
Under 16 golfers. . . . .	93
Total . . . . .	7042



A prominent local DJ hosts the event, and a Facebook page, dedicated to this event, has been developed where these members and their friends can display and tag photographs, comment and become supporters. Each Sundowner event has attracted over 200 people who are excited about their club supporting them.

“They are proud to host their friends who are rapidly applying for membership. It is the cool place to be and be seen,” Robbie added.

Historically the executive management was incentivised by the cost savings made, specifically in the maintenance area. This has had disastrous results.

“Arthur successfully encouraged the committee to ensure that this type of incentive ceased. A new holistic scheme is being introduced based not only on the financial returns but also on member and staff satisfaction, positive brand development, social responsibility project implementation and membership growth,” Robbie outlined.

Another key issue in South Africa is the acceptance and integration of previously disadvantaged individuals because of the past regime apartheid laws, an exceptionally difficult area to manage because of the sensitivities experienced by all parties.

“CCJ is proud of the mix of members, although there remains much work to be done in this area. The club strives to ensure that the club remains aspirational, progressive and a place where members meet, have fun and feel special,” Coy explained.

“I have found when talking to other club managers from the USA and Europe is the assumption that if a club has 7,000-plus members, it cannot be an exclusive club with aspirations. CCJ is really aspirational and exclusive not only because of the pricing, but because of the strict membership process,” Robbie explained.

“We all look to the future, not the past. We all acknowledge the importance of traditions, but believe that the club must become more contemporary and remain relevant to stakeholders going forward,” Coy expounded.

“Country Club Johannesburg has a growing membership during this time of uncertainty, and there has been no relaxation of entrance fees, and the annual subscriptions/dues are expensive.

“The club has an extremely strong balance sheet, positive earnings before interest, depreciation and taxation and there is an air of excitement and enthusiasm amongst members. Long may this continue!” he concluded. **BR**

**TOP PRIVATE CLUB PRESIDENTS 2011  
FULL LIST ON PAGE 136**

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# 2011 Top 20 Private Club Presidents of the Year

BoardRoom magazine, for the fourth year, is recognizing 20 club presidents and chairs as Private Club Presidents of the Year – 2011 for practicing what they preach – leadership for the betterment of their clubs.

“This kind of recognition for volunteers who give so much to the club has been long overdue, and since the first awards there’s been a steady growth in the nominations by club general managers and others in the private club industry,” exclaimed BoardRoom publisher John Fornaro.

Nominations have come from seven countries for the *Private Club President of the Year* recognition, and this year, club presidents from South Africa, Canada and various U.S. states are among the private club’s top presidents. Private club board presidents play a huge role in the professional operations of their club as a volunteer working diligently with their board of directors and general managers, striving for well informed, but not emotional decisions. These outstanding presidents exemplify the focus on the leadership responsibilities, the accountability and the manage-

ment of the board, providing a healthy respect for the club’s macro-management. They understand the importance of working, effectively and efficiently, with their volunteer boards and the dedication that’s required from everyone with whom they work. Systems along 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.

A successful board president draws upon the expertise of other board members, the club’s institutional memory and stewardship of the club’s resources. As well, the board president provides new board members and future president with information they need to perform effectively as board members.

*Congratulations to these outstanding private club board presidents. BR*

Arthur Coy . . . . .	The Country Club of Johannesburg . . . . .	South Africa	
Brett Shane Bernstein . . . . .	Lakewood Country Club . . . . .	USA	
Jack Berry . . . . .	Willow Oaks Country Club . . . . .	USA	
Copeland G. Bertsche . . . . .	Montclair Golf Club . . . . .	USA	
Carl Dill . . . . .	Mediterra . . . . .	USA	
Garth Elliott . . . . .	Randpark Club . . . . .	South Africa	
Jon C. Flora . . . . .	The Country Club at DC Ranch . . . . .	USA	
Mark Gercenstein . . . . .	Bend Golf and Country Club . . . . .	USA	
J. Littleton “Litt” Glover . . . . .	Wade Hampton . . . . .	USA	
Joseph S. Haas . . . . .	Chicago Yacht Club . . . . .	USA	
Mark Hill . . . . .	Kirtland Country Club . . . . .	USA	
Stephen Karpf . . . . .	The Country Club at Mirasol . . . . .	USA	
Patrick Kelly . . . . .	Avondale Golf Club . . . . .	USA	
Chet Kronenberg . . . . .	Mulholland Tennis Club . . . . .	USA	
Robert W. Kummer, Jr. . . . .	Birnam Wood Golf Club . . . . .	USA	
Arthur M. Scully, III . . . . .	Fox Chapel Golf Club . . . . .	USA	
Paul G. Stevens . . . . .	Belfair . . . . .	USA	
Algot Thorell, Jr. . . . .	Philadelphia Cricket Club . . . . .	USA	
John Tomsy . . . . .	Rockrimmon Country Club . . . . .	USA	
Gilles Vézina . . . . .	Ottawa RA Centre . . . . .	Canada	

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