



This is the story of a country club that's pulled itself up by its bootstraps, thanks to the visionaries and enlightened leadership who helped get it there!

For many years locals viewed Mission Viejo Country Club as a “low brow, low self-esteem” club suffering with an outdated clubhouse, a Trent Jones Sr.-designed golf course badly needing many improvements, stale membership sales and little or no money to pay for any improvements.

Now thanks to the stupendous efforts of successive presidents, careful planning, input from a studious membership and creative outside help, Mission Viejo Country Club is now a gem on the southern California landscape.

And for the first time, two of the club's presidents, Bruce Carson (2006 and 2007) and John Rydell (2010), jointly share the honor of being selected as *BoardRoom* magazine's *Distinguished Club Presidents* for 2010.

BoardRoom, for the third year, is recognizing 21 clubs as Private Club Presidents of the Year – 2010 for practicing what they preach – leadership for the betterment of their clubs. These are board presidents or chairs who have served as the volunteer leaders of their club.

“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

Mission Viejo's Bruce Carson and John Rydell Honored As BoardRoom's Distinguished Club Presidents. *By Dave White, editor*

Distinguished Club Presidents

Kopplin & Kuebler LLC. The firm, with principals Richard Kopplin and Kurt Kuebler, for the third 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 this era when clubs are expecting top performance from the GM/COO, it’s especially gratifying to come across a president who truly ‘gets it’, and ensures that in order to achieve that top performance, they have to provide strong support and

guidance, and make sure that roadblocks, real or perceived, are not obstacles to the GM/COO’s success,” Kuebler injected.

“This is an extremely exciting story in a private club world that’s been ravaged by a recession,” exclaimed BoardRoom publisher, John Fornaro. “Mission Viejo with these leaders and their out-of-the-box thinking have been undaunted in turning their club around. It’s a wonderful accomplishment.

“I admire this board...these people. One of major points is that they admitted what they don’t know, but they knew the issues and went out and found the best people to work with them to solve their problems. For many years I’ve said there are consultants who can help boards solve problems the clubs do know about, but then again they may not be aware of them.”

Nomination of the top 21 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 begins with a seven-acre parcel of land used for the Mission Viejo’s overflow parking and water storage area, the club’s desire for improvements, and the City of Mission Viejo’s need, pushed by the State of California’s requirement, for more affordable housing. This has turned out to be a deal made for each other, and these two central issues have sparked the revitalization of the club.

“We’ve suffered from low esteem for a long time,” related Carson “Our golf course wasn’t something to be proud of, we faced many challenges and

Page 20: L-R Bruce Carson and John Rydell
Page 21: Clockwise upper left Mission Viejo Country Club General Manager Brad Shupe; Hole No. 6; Hole No. 2



COVER STORY

much of the time there was a lot of finger pointing...we were blaming each other. We had few successes but when this opportunity came along our club members banded together to make it happen.

"A real estate developer expressed an interest in buying the land and we began to investigate the options," Carson recalled recently. "It became quite clear the club had other options for parking and water storage. At the same time other developers expressed an interest in the property, in a super hot southern California real estate market."

Patience sometimes really is a virtue. It took the club two years to market the land, during which time the land value rose considerably.

"Initially, we felt the club might get \$7 million for the land," Carson explained, "but as the marketing progressed, more interested parties surfaced and ultimately the club sold the land for \$20 million.

"This had become a one-time opportunity and we wanted to make sure we did it right for our members, on time and on budget," exclaimed Carson.

Decisions were made 1) to build a new clubhouse and 2) put money into the golf course and 3) other facilities.

At the same time, the city in response to a state mandate, supported the club's efforts to sell the parcel by rezoning it residential to meet the its need for more affordable housing. The net effect? The club received maximum value for disposable land at a time when club improvements were critical.

Because of this rezoning, the club also was able to minimize the risk for the developer and did not have to wait for the end of the entitlement process to get its money...\$20 million.

"We banked the \$20 million and then got excited about all the possibilities," Carson enthused.

"Many questions arose," add Rydell. "How do we spend the money? What do we need? How do we make sure our members see this as a credible opportunity? How do we make sure we do this right?"

For starters, the club brought in professional help.

"We invested in a membership survey, evaluated the results, presented options to the membership, and finally laid out the entire investment back into the club," Carson explained.

"All presidents and boards during the three years were transparent and involved the membership through polls and surveys when additional input was required."

Carson, a member of Mission Viejo Country Club since 1985, served two terms as president (2006 and 2007) during the project's initial stages.

"What we have now is the result of the vision and hard work of a considerable number of people.

And that includes John O'Connor, president in 2008 and Mike Walsh whose term finished in 2009. "These presidents brought in their expertise and have been an absolutely critical part of this story."

John Rydell has been the club's leader in the critical final stages.

"With the process created, we worked with the members, we hired an architect and builder for the new clubhouse, and said, 'Give us what we want for \$13 million', and we hired project managers to protect us from ourselves," Rydell related.

"The club's theme: 'On time and on budget,'" Rydell added. "The objective, of course was to keep the process as transparent as possible so members would, in good faith, trust the process...so the leaders and the process would have credibility with our members."

The membership survey was done with a view to better understanding just what the members wanted...of course, there were dissenters, at least in the earlier stages.

"But we had lots of time for a buy-in by our members. We had the Club Development Committee (headed by past president Bruce Carson) help with the planning (the look and feel of what we wanted) and to communicate with the various factions within the club," Rydell added.





Mission Viejo Country Club Hole 3

“The committee also assisted with selection of the clubhouse architect,” explained Brad Shupe, the club’s general manager who took over the management reins part way through the whole development process.

“Within one day of the resignation of the former general manager, I met with the entire senior staff and the board of directors to determine our action plan,” added Rydell.

“Days later, Shupe was named our interim general manager while we began a four-month search for a new GM/COO.

“We were fortunate not to miss a beat with our development project because Brad had been involved with much of the work that was taking place so he was able to get up to speed quickly.

“We had a very committed ‘special projects’ committee that was leading a lot of the work, and our former general manager was contracted to help with the transition of a few key pieces of information that he had been leading,” Rydell explained.

And at the end of the four-month search, Shupe took over the GM-COO’s position permanently.

The governance for clubs in situations like this can really become an issue.

Mission Viejo during the transition period, made some moves to avoid difficulties, not only during the redevelopment process, but also for later on down the road.

“We made the decision to have future boards selected by a nominating committee,” Rydell added. “In fact, that’s how I became involved. If I’d followed the former process, it would’ve been a much longer time before I became involved on the board.

“Our past presidents are key to this nominating committee and have sought out people based on their professional abilities and certain skill sets that we know are of benefit to the club,” Rydell said.

This certainly has allowed for the continuity and intelligent use of the club’s institutional memory with this particular development concept and project.

The board of directors’ selection process allows only nominations for as many candidates as there are openings. This policy allows for write-ins, but minimizes the election of directors who might make difficult the need for continuity of concept.

Another change was identifying the club president’s successor three months before the transitioning to each year’s new board. This policy allowed the new president to shadow the outgoing president and improve continuity.

“It all started with developing a comprehensive plan that the membership truly believes reflected the needs and priorities of the club,” outlined Carson. “There was never a temptation to significantly waiver or change directions. Obviously not changing course was a significant factor in accomplishing our ‘no compromise goal of on time and on budget’.

“There were a couple of areas of contention,” Carson added. “Would we be able to hold to our budget and timeframe and secondly, what kind of club did we want in the future?”

Simply continuing as a mediocre golf course wasn’t and isn’t in the books.

“Our future is as a full service club, providing golf, clubhouse amenities, tennis and some fitness. And we market ourselves with families, and that’s what our members want.” Carson added.

“Skeptics wondered if we could really pull this off, and whether or not our members really wanted to spend the money and make changes. The minority quickly realized our members really wanted a full service club.”

Rydell added, “But the result did suggest we would have to prioritize our money.” With that, the members voted on how to spend \$20 million, with the assurance of ‘on time and on budget’.

“Once it got going, it snowballed,” related GM Shupe.

Communications with members have played a huge role at Mission Viejo and that’s fallen largely to Shupe. Members received constant communiqués during the whole process and once construction started, tours of the new clubhouse etc.

“Change is very difficult for members and staff. Weekly communication is key to minimize rumors and stimulate confidence,” Shupe explained.

“Pictures, videos, and words are all important and effective in today’s culture.

Keeping the members using their club during construction was difficult but extremely important. The club must remain a huge part of their social life.”

In fact, when the old clubhouse was demolished, members had to retreat to the patio for food and beverage service, and it was packed with members.

“The membership is excited and appreciative of the new facilities,” President Rydell emphasized. “Usage of the course, practice facility and clubhouse has exceeded all expectations. But we are not planning to stagnate.

“We’ve initiated a very aggressive strategic planning process to evaluate our future and continue to improve and grow. Significant opportunities remain, including improving golf course water quality, improving our fitness offering, and adding additional parking to satisfy the new level of activity.”

Sometimes an undercurrent surfaces, not only for projects like this, but in the daily management of clubs. And that’s the micro-management of club’s management by the club’s volunteer board of directors or committee members, especially if the board members’ roles and management’s role are not clearly defined.

Mission Viejo has had some third party help with role clarification, and it’s not been an issue for GM Brad Shupe. Carson as president has also faced the issue.

“I felt, as president, that I had to fight it many times in our board meetings and if you don’t prevent it, it’ll happen,” Carson related. If fighting micromanagement comes from a volunteer board president, that’s half the battle for the management and staff.

At the end of the day, the takeaway is the cooperation between and professionalism of the current and past board presidents working together to fix a long-term problem. This club addressed the issues and got together to solve the problems.

Kudos to our distinguished club presidents of the year: Bruce Carson, past president and John Rydell, president, and members of Mission Viejo Country Club, Mission Viejo, CA for such a marvelous success. **BR**

Along with the top club presidents for 2010, we also want to recognize our first recipient from 2008, Fernando Leal, president of Addison Reserve Country Club, Boca Raton, FL again for his continuing service.

“We are recognizing him because he continues to be on the board, and today still considered one of the top board presidents of the year,” explained BoardRoom publisher John Fornaro.

“Since he has already received this recognition and can’t qualify again, we are giving him a special recognition for what he continues to do for the club, the members and the support he gives his General Manager Michael McCarthy.”

Below is the list of recipient for 2010. Stories on each president will be published in BoardRoom throughout the year...four in each issue beginning in March/April.

Distinguished Presidents

John Rydell & Bruce Carson

Mission Viejo Country Club, Mission Viejo, CA

George Barton

The River Club, Kansas City, MI

W. O. (Bill) Brazil III

Biltmore Forest Country Club, Asheville, NC

Andrew Clark

Thornhill Golf & Country Club, Thornhill, ON

Michael Cole

Waverley Country Club, Portland, OR

Kevin Connelly

Bethesda Country Club, Bethesda, MD

Romano Curti

Beach Grove Golf & Country Club, Tecumseh, ON

Michael H. DeGroot

Port Carling Golf & Country Club, Port Carling, ON

Bruce Foster

Derrick Golf & Winter Club, Edmonton, AB

Robert Heflin

Mesa Verde Country Club, Costa Mesa, CA

Harvey Krauser

Boca West Country Club, Boca Raton, FL

Jonathan Larsen

Jonathan Club, Los Angeles, CA

James LeBlanc

Saw Grass Country Club, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL

Commodore G. Duncan Lott III

Royal Palm Yacht & Country Club, Boca Raton, FL

Doug Mackay

Rosedale Golf Club, Toronto, ON

Ron Mariello

Ballantyne Country Club, Charlotte, NC

David Schopp

Knollwood Club, Lake Forest, IL

Ivan Snyder

Broken Sound, Boca Raton, FL

Larry Stopol

Middle Bay Country Club, Oceanside, NY

Frank Tarling

Beach Grove Golf Club, Tsawwassen, BC

Vince Villani

Amelia Island Club, Amelia Island, FL



BOARDROOM

Top Private Club President

Who is your choice as the top private club board president?

Many people and companies associated with the private club industry are given due recognition for their accomplishments, and now *BoardRoom magazine* is focusing on selection and recognition of the *Private Club Board President of the Year*.

BoardRoom magazine, through a nomination and selection process, will honor 20 board president finalists worldwide and one prestigious *Private Club Board President of the Year Award*.

Top Board President Selection Process

The top 20 private club board president finalists will be selected by a BoardRoom committee comprised of industry experts and sponsors, who can make an expert judgment, who have an understanding of the industry, the structure of the board of directors, and the role and responsibilities of a club's board of directors. A third party accounting firm will audit results.

Special Section Announcement

A special section published in BoardRoom magazine will be devoted to the announcement of the top regional club presidents and the "Private Club Board President of the Year."

Entry and Deadline

Visit www.boardroommagazine.com to download the criteria and application form. Entries must be submitted no later than Tuesday, November 15, 2011.

For further information contact John Fornaro (949) 376-8889 ext. 105 or johnf@apcd.com

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