

# New Star in the Cosmos

**MCMAHON / CLUB & RESORT BUSINESS**  
Excellence in Club Management Awards Winner

Why would such a bright young manager want to work in a club where the average member age is over 70? Because, for starters, the members are even brighter.

By Joe Barks, Editor



Peter Lovelace knew that by starting his career at the Cosmos Club in Washington, D.C., he'd be surrounded by the best *and* the brightest.

**Y**ou're a top graduate of a leading hospitality and tourism management program, where among many notable achievements, you founded and served as the first President of the school's student chapter of the Club Managers Association of America.

As part of your preparation for a career in club management, you complemented your formal education with four years of summer internships at a variety of club and resort properties, including the famous Homestead Resort.

You're now ready to set out to find your first professional job in the field—and with those credentials, you can pretty much have your pick of first-rung management positions at any club or resort that's hiring, anywhere in the country. And in an era when everyone says that survival in the business will hinge on properties' abilities to successfully attract new and younger members through family-oriented offers, you decide to work for...a city club with no recreational programs, where the average age of members is over 70?

## Alive and Well

That was the path Peter Lovelace chose after graduating from James Madison University in 2006, as he took his first job as Assistant Manager at the Cosmos Club in Washington, D.C. Two years later, he's not only surviving, but prospering in his chosen field—so much so that he was selected as a "Rising Star" through the 2007 Excellence in Club Management Awards co-sponsored by the McMahon Group and *Club & Resort Business*.

And, despite what's often said about the prospects for city clubs, the future looks quite bright for the Cosmos Club, too. In no small part, this is because of some of the initiatives that Lovelace has already helped to direct in his time there—not

only to streamline operations, add innovative new programs and update communications through a new Web site and other means for the Cosmos Club's existing 3,000 members, but also to help direct a drive that led to one of the most successful years for adding new members (150) in the club's history.

Another reason for the strong standing of the Cosmos Club, of course, is that it's not just any "city club." And there's a very good reason why its average age is at the high end, and will always stay there: it takes time, and years, to build up the kind of resume needed to qualify for membership. Founded in 1878 by "scientists, explorers and academic gentlemen," the club's strict entry requirements call for demonstration of "scholarship, creative genius, or intellectual distinction."

The biggest deterrent that might keep a talented young manager from wanting to work at the Cosmos Club, in fact, would not be the gap between his or her age and that of many of the club's members, but rather the intimidation factor. As you walk through one hallway of the club, you will suddenly find yourself staring at 32 framed photographic portraits displayed under the heading, "Members Awarded Nobel Prizes." Farther down the same wall, you'll find a display of another 45 "Members Awarded Presidential Medal of Freedom." Turn around and you'll find a separate room, with 56 photographs of "Members Awarded Pulitzer Prizes."

"It does makes you check whatever you write *very* carefully, before you send anything out to members," Lovelace laughs.

But while some young managers might cower in the presence of all of this formidable brainpower, Lovelace embraced it, as one of the main reasons he wanted to start his career at the Cosmos Club. And once on the staff, he wasn't shy about tapping into how he could make use of some of the special resources that such an elite membership offered. For example,

# TODAY'S MANAGER

Located on the heart of Washington's "Embassy Row," the Cosmos Club has 3,000 members and an F&B operation that serves 125,000 people a year.



## Ideas CONCEIVED AND IMPLEMENTED AT COSMOS CLUB UNDER PETER LOVELACE'S STEWARDSHIP

- Enlisted knowledgeable and respected club members, such as Judith Martin ("Miss Manners"), to help with staff training.
- Set up new inventory system for club property, using photos to help staff make easier identification of needed items.

as he put together the etiquette component of a new staff training program, he solicited the assistance of journalist and Cosmos Club member Judith Martin, more well-known for her "Miss Manners" newspaper columns and books.

"Who's going to argue with 'Miss Manners'?" Lovelace explains. "It just made sense to go 'right to the source,' especially since she was uniquely available to us. And she really provided some great practical insights that went beyond what's available from the standard guidelines."

### Plenty to Do

Besides the opportunity to serve, and learn from, such stimulating members, Lovelace also saw that the sheer size of the Cosmos Club

would afford him a tremendous opportunity to quickly get immersed in many aspects of club operations, on a scale that could fast-track his professional growth. With dining facilities in its stately building on Washington's Embassy Row that can seating more than 1,000 people, the Cosmos Club serves over 125,000 people during its fiscal year (total F&B sales are \$5 million annually). The club's event calendar includes a full schedule of programs including evening lectures, musical concerts, sightseeing trips, bridge and chess tournaments, and a variety of activity clubs, and its building includes 60 overnight rooms and a fitness facility that is in line for future expansion (with Lovelace prominently involved in the planning).



Membership of the Cosmos Club over its 130 years has included 32 Nobel Prize winners, 56 winners of the Pulitzer Prize, and 45 who have been awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom.



### Passing the Tests

Most of all, though, Lovelace's decision to work at the Cosmos Club came about primarily because he did his homework long before he got out of school—and by doing so, he became smart enough about all of his career options to know exactly what he would, and wouldn't, be getting into by choosing it over other types of properties.

"One of the things that Dr. Brett Horton, the director of the James Madison program, always pushed us to do was to use our summer internships to sample each niche within the industry, so we could then zero in on which one worked best for us," says Lovelace, who, in addition to the Homestead, worked one year at Cosmos and two at a private country club during his four summer experiences.

"That advice really held true for me," he adds. "Through my internships, I found that I really liked the balance in quality of life that working in a city club could offer—while you still have to work many hours, it seemed easier to make a clean break of it once your work was done. Plus you were then right in the middle of a city where there's so much to do, as opposed to perhaps being in a more remote location. And it also seemed that a city club was more of a business operation than some country clubs."

Most of all, Lovelace's internship at Cosmos assured him that he would have the right kind of relationship with his General Manager, Bill Caldwell. "Dr. Horton also stressed that you need to analyze the club as a whole, and not just from the standpoint of the facilities and membership, but perhaps most importantly look at who you'd be working for," Lovelace says. "That's also proved out to be true—I have friends who've gone to work in other [club positions] and haven't been nearly as fortunate as me, in terms of being able to work for someone who is not only a mentor and coach, but also encourages you to introduce ideas and supports you as do, and doesn't try to take the credit for your successes."

For all of the careful thought Lovelace put into his eventual decision to begin his career at the Cosmos Club, though, he never knew that he really didn't have any choice. By chance, at a dinner while he was still a young student, Lovelace sat next to Caldwell, and that set the plans in motion to make sure he came to Washington upon graduation.

"It was lucky that I first got to meet Peter that way, but I also know you have to make your own luck in this business, too," Caldwell says now. "It was clear that even at a young age, Peter was beating the averages in every way you size up [potential hires]. So I made sure we kept checking in with him and then got him to come here for one of his internships."

"That [intern] experience only convinced us more that we needed to have him here after he graduated, to help us move forward," Caldwell adds. "So we actually created a new Assistant Manager position for him. And in the short time he's been here, it's become clear he is, and will continue to be, a star."

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## Achievements

AT THE COSMOS CLUB WITH PETER LOVELACE'S INVOLVEMENT

- Started summer programs to improve food and beverage sales and room occupancy.
- Worked with Membership Committee to develop innovative recruiting and marketing approaches that led to one of the club's most successful years for bringing in new members (150).

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