

Home Grown

By Joe Barks, Editor

During this year's annual meeting of the Genesee Valley Club (GVC) in Rochester, N.Y., Assistant Manager John Corey was called to the front of the room to receive his Rising Star Award (as part of the Excellence in Club Management Awards co-sponsored by the McMahon Group and *Club & Resort Business*). The 160 members in attendance responded with a level of enthusiasm normally seen when trying to get rock stars to do an encore. As almost all of the members sprung to their feet to applaud vigorously, one in the back of the room even tilted back his head and bellowed, "Johnnnn Corrrreyyy!"

After Corey accepted his award with brief remarks that reflected his characteristic humility, he quickly stepped aside for the next order of business: bringing the rest of the GVC staff into the room to be recognized for their efforts throughout the year. This time, as each new staff member was introduced, it was Corey himself who applauded with the most vigorous and genuine appreciation.

Those two scenes—along with the fact that a record 160 members were in attendance—did much to capture how and why the 745-member GVC, which is celebrating its 125th anniversary in 2010, is showing real signs of life, at a time when

Achievements

AT GENESEE VALLEY CLUB

WITH JOHN COREY'S INVOLVEMENT/DIRECTION

- Implemented regular themed nights for both formal and casual dining areas, including Lobster Night, Prime Rib Night, Italian Night and Classics Night.



- Developed new beverage cost controls and reduced beverage inventory by \$20,000 in one year.
- Working with department heads, planned and implemented new point-of-sale system to replace old chit system.



eulogies are being written for many city clubs.

In reports given during the annual meeting, the club's officers cited significant performance over budget for the second straight year for both the operating and net income lines, with member utilization exceeding projections in almost every category, including dining, beverage, fitness and parties. GVC is also preparing to renovate its Armstrong Grill and make other significant upgrades to its historic building in downtown Rochester, all using cash on hand.

Much of the credit for all of these achievements was given at the annual meeting to the GVC staff that is led by General Manager and Chief Operating Officer Tom Spellman. And in turn, Spellman, who came to the club three years ago, is quick to point to John Corey as a key reason why so many positive strides have been made at GVC so quickly.

Fortunate Inheritance

Every new GM is happy to find a loyal and long-tenured manager on hand who can be relied on for valuable insights into the unique aspects of a club's operation and culture. But

PHOTOS COURTESY GENESEE VALLEY CLUB



After receiving rousing applause for his Rising Star recognition at the Genesee Valley Club annual meeting, John Corey was every bit as enthusiastic and appreciative as his fellow staff members were introduced.



few have ever been so fortunate to find such a goldmine of a resource as Corey, who literally grew up professionally with GVC, starting as a busboy in 1989 at the age of 18, and then moving up steadily through a series of supervisory and management roles.

When Spellman arrived, Corey was in the role of "Service Manager," and a traditional Assistant Manager position didn't exist at GVC. "My background is with the Air Force, and I'm used to standard organizational charts," Spellman recalls. "It was clear that John was doing everything—and more—that was needed in the way of an assistant manager. He knew everything about the facilities, as well as about our service and food and beverage operations.

"Most importantly," Spellman adds, "it was clear that John had all of the traits you really look for in an assistant: hard-working, very loyal, and focused foremost on doing anything and everything for the membership."

For his part, Corey says his approach to good performance as a club manager, from the moment he started in the business, has always been built around the same principles: "Keep to yourself, watch and observe so you can learn as much as you can, and soak everything up like a sponge. And if you have ideas that you believe can work, find a way to get them done."

And, as you'd expect from someone who's worked his way up the management ladder at such a steady pace, Corey's also a big believer—and practitioner—of the idea that even when something's been done well, there's always a way it can be done even better the next time around.

"When we can get members to come to a new event, the real goal is to get them to come back—and bring someone else with them," Corey says. "That's how we've taken things like our annual clambake to the point where we now serve 500 on

Ideas

IMPLEMENTED SUCCESSFULLY AT GENESEE VALLEY CLUB WITH JOHN COREY'S INVOLVEMENT/DIRECTION





- Implemented standardized online reservation system for dinner and member events, coordinating all information with Membership Communication Office.
- Developed and implemented new kids' playground (\$11,000 project) and babysitting services through Kids Club.
- Plans and organizes annual trips to Buffalo Bills football game for 50 members with food and beverage service, bus tailgate party, and tickets to game.

the lawn and have a wait list, or how our Easter brunch has grown to a record of nearly 450 this year.

"Sure, the bigger the events get, the more operational challenges there are," Corey shrugs. "But if you let that stand in the way of providing something that so many members show that they want, then you probably really shouldn't be in the club business."

C&RB



The transition for Tom Spellman (far left) after arriving as Genesee Valley Club's new GM/COO was made much easier by the presence of long-tenured managers like Corey and the club's 37-year Maitre d'hotel, Genaro Felix.

