



PHOTOS COURTESY BROKEN SOUND CLUB

Stewards of Excellence

How recipients of the 2005 McMahon Group/C&RB Excellence in Club Management™ Awards have made their clubs, and themselves, stand out.

By Joe Barks, Editor

Visibility, says John Crean, General Manager and Chief Operating Officer of the Broken Sound Club in Boca Raton, Fla., is “the whole key to success in club management.” When he made this comment in December, in an in-person interview with *Club & Resort Business*, Crean was referring specifically to his belief that



PHOTO COURTESY BROKEN SOUND CLUB



After getting a “standing o” from club members when presented with his Excellence in Club Management Award, Broken Sound Club GM/COO John Crean (holding award) accepted more congratulations from the McMahon Group’s Chairman, William P. McMahon, Sr.

*“In a short time,
he replaced chaos
with order.”*

er do an effective job than sitting in meetings or behind a desk.

But visibility for club managers can come in more forms than just face time. It can also come in the appearance of a property, and how many people can be seen not only using, but enjoying the facilities, and what numbers jump out from the balance sheet. Because John Crean has mastered how to look extremely good in all of these ways, he achieved a new type of visibility after finishing his interview with *C&RB*, when he accepted the 2005 Excellence in Club Management™ Award, co-sponsored by the McMahon Group, Inc. and *Club & Resort Business*, as the winner in the category for Country/Golf Clubs with 600 or More Full-privilege Members.

Visibility in all of its forms is also a recurring

always walking around a club property, and not only mingling with, but seeking out members as much as possible, was far more valuable in helping a club manager

theme for the other 2005 Excellence in Club Management winners, as detailed in the separate reports in this article on Michael Zusack of Manasquan River Golf Club, winner in the Country/Golf Clubs With Under 600 Full-privilege Members category (see box, below), and Robert Bird of the Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club, winner in the City, Athletic, or Specialty (Non-Golf) Club of All Types category (see box, p. 16).

(A separate report on the 2005 Rising Star Award Winner, Robert Artley, Director of Food and Beverage for Boca West Country Club, will appear in an upcoming issue of *Club & Resort Business*).

No Place to Hide

In John Crean's case, the opportunities for visibility came quickly and furiously after he was hired (from Long Island's Muttontown Club) as Broken Sound's new GM in 2002. In fact, Crean really couldn't have found any place to hide if he'd wanted to; the walls were literally coming down around him, as part of a massive, \$34 million renovation of the Broken Sound clubhouse.

The photos at the top of page 12 show that the cost, time and disruption of the renovation led to an impressive outcome, both inside and outside

Florida Comes North



**Michael Zusack, GM/COO,
Manasquan River
Golf Club**

This year's group of Excellence in Club Management Awards winners has a distinct Florida flavor to it. In addition to two winners (John Crean and Robert Artley) who currently work in Boca Raton clubs, Michael Zusack, COO of Manasquan River Golf Club in Brielle, N.J., served as Clubhouse Manager of the Woodfield Country Club in Boca before returning to his native state in 2001 to take his current position.

At Manasquan, Zusack successfully implemented some of the outdoor-oriented event and activity ideas that he learned not only while at Woodfield, but also as an assistant GM at the Yacht and Country Club in Stuart, Fla. Specifically, he earned his Excellence in Club Management Award in the Country/Golf Clubs With Under

600 Full-privilege Members category for achievements and innovations such as these:

- A steady increase in F&B profits since 2001.
- Sunday Hawaiian and Jamaican Grills that attract (weather permitting) an average of 125 covers each week on patio.
- Wednesday Member Appreciation Nights that feature three-course dinners for \$16.95 and are full each week.
- Increased attendance for black-tie New Year's Eve dinner from an average of 80 covers to annual sellouts (230 people).
- An increase in banquet sales of over 25% since 2001, thanks largely to creation of a Director of Catering and Special Events position.
- Starting a Junior Club Championship, with finals held on "Championship Saturday" along with Men's and Ladies Championships.
- Improvement in members' dining satisfaction ratings from 8.4 to 9.6 in three years.
- Completion of a \$1.5 million pro shop construction project on time and on budget.
- Development of the club's Web site (www.mrgc.com) and encouragement of member use, through incentives like a free lunch to the person who visits the site most frequently each month.



A profile of the McMahon/C&RB "2005 Rising Star Winner," **Robert Artley**, Director of Food and Beverage for **Boca West Country Club**, Boca Raton, Fla., will appear in a future issue of *Club & Resort Business*, along with photos of the presentations of awards to Michael Zusack, Robert Bird, and Artley.

the property. But when Crean arrived at Broken Sound, it had no permanent facilities, and in fact had been torn up to the extent that there were no offices, pro shops, golf club storage areas, swimming pools, or dining rooms. Crean thus had little trouble recognizing—and completing—his first task: securing trailers for his staff and himself (on the rare occasions he would use an office) to work from.

Beyond this physical disorder, the always impeccably dressed Crean had a new addition to his wardrobe—a huge target on his back. He had come into a tumultuous situation at Broken Sound, where residents had wrested control from its original owner through prolonged and contentious litigation. One of the first tasks of the newly formed Board of Governors then elected by the homeowners was to hire a new GM—and to say that Crean was being watched closely from his first day on the job is to say that a heat lamp is designed to help things stay hot.

But Crean, born in Ireland's County Roscommon, immediately began to win converts—not only through his unflinching wit and charm, but also by demonstrating boundless energy and feistiness, and taking on every challenge with all the fury and determination of an Irish bantamweight fighting his way out of a corner.

"John was immediately recognized as a true professional, and earned the trust, respect and admiration of members in every one of Broken Sound's four membership categories," says Franklin Loh, who served as President of the club in 2005. "In a short time, he replaced chaos with order."

In the process, Crean also directed the replacement of key numbers on Broken Sound's operating ledger, as follows:

- Food and beverage revenues jumped from \$1.3 million in 2002 to \$2.3 million in 2005—and this after Crean eliminated a \$1,500 per year

minimum and replaced it with a lower monthly service charge. Food quality and service were also improved to where daily lunches and dinners at Broken Sound are now frequently sold out, or at least require reservations.

- Golf rounds increased by over 10,000 in 2005, after introducing an annual cart charge that led to increased usage of both of the club's courses.

- Banquet sales jumped 100% over budget.

- Membership satisfaction rose from 62% to 92%, the highest level in club history.

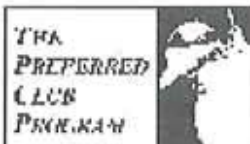
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The club life at Broken Sound is now a lot more serene, thanks to John Crean.

direction, the opening of Broken Sound's main clubhouse after the renovation was pushed six weeks ahead of schedule—meaning it would now open in mid-December *before* the 2004 holidays, rather than in the middle of January 2005, when things might be a bit calmer. Undaunted as always, Crean pulled off a combination grand reopening/New Year's Eve celebration in a 250,000-sq. ft., air conditioned tent, serving dinner to 1,450 members and guests—after which everyone was treated to a circus-theme party, complete with leopards (and huge video screens for those who didn't want to get too close).

• In the midst of all the “planned” turmoil that Crean was dealing with, there was the little matter of an extremely active hurricane season over the past few years. “There have been five [hurricanes] to affect us over the last two and a half years, three of them big ones,” he told *C&RB* in

though, are the “Crean to the Rescue” stories that have become the stuff of legend at Broken Sound. A couple of the best:

• Under Crean's

December. After the most recent one (Wilma) brought ferocious winds that knocked out power not only at the club, but throughout members' homes as well, Crean put his usual emergency plan into place (securing documents and member files for safe storage, establishing a special communications link through the club Web site). Then he got in touch with the FEMA office handling disaster relief. Told that supplies such as ice and water could only be issued through local municipalities, Crean convinced FEMA it would be a lot more efficient (and lighten an already huge load on city of Boca Raton workers) if he handled distribution within the club community.

“I basically asked them what they thought would be better—to have 1000 members go individually in their cars [to city distribution points], and waste all that gas and create all that congestion, or to have me and a few other staff members bring some trucks to pick up enough for everyone,” Crean recalls. Believe it or not, someone from the federal government saw the sense in his suggestion. Talk about effective visibility. *C&RB*

To comment about this story, suggest topics you'd like to see covered in future issues of *C&RB*, or just ask a question, contact editor@clubandresortbusiness.com

Kudos From the Commodore



Robert Bird, GM, Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club

Hong Kong has certainly seen some momentous changes in recent years, but something that's never wavered is the impeccable service and first-class amenities provided to members of the Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club (RHKYC), founded in 1849. What makes this particularly impressive is that standards must be maintained at RHKYC while serving a membership that totals 11,000 (making it the world's largest sailing club), and encompasses 40 nationalities and 6,800 “overseas absent” members who may only use the club a few times in their life, but still expect to be treated as a “regular” each time they do.

“[The location and make-up of the RHKYC] membership creates a challenge for any General

Manager,” says the RHKYC's Commodore, Inge Stropmf-Jensen. “Not only to overcome cultural differences, but also due to the Club's age and very traditional ways of thinking.”

For how he's met those challenges since becoming the RHKYC's GM in 1999, Robert Bird earned the McMahon/*C&RB* 2005 Excellence in Club Management Award in the City, Athletic or Specialty (Non-Golf) Club of All Types Category.

Specific accomplishments cited in recognizing Bird included these figures for his six-year tenure as GM (all achieved, Stropmf-Jensen notes, “during a period of economic deflation in Hong Kong, and without any expansion”):

- A 40% increase in Bistro (casual dining) sales, a near doubling (89%) of annual sales in the Compass Room (fine dining), and an 83% increase in annual banqueting sales, with the Banqueting Department now hosting over 1,000 private functions a year.

- Record levels of advertising in the club's monthly magazine, *Ahoy!*, which now has a print run of 3,100 copies and recently celebrated its 30th anniversary with a special edition.

- Reduction of club committees from 22 to 15, after Byrd directed an analysis of committee structure and effectiveness, and recommended a better alignment between committees and management.

