

Westward Expansion

By Joe Barks, Editor



If what each side was thinking had been verbalized as part of the negotiation process, here's how the discussion might have gone:

Big Canyon Country Club, Newport Beach, Calif.: We want you to come out here to be our new General Manager/Chief Operating Officer. We want someone with a strong, East Coast-based club management pedigree, because we know that means you'll have the discipline, energy, work ethic, perseverance and reasoned, analytical approach that's going to be needed to take us to the next level.

David Voorhees: Yes, I can be your man for all of that. There's just one non-negotiable condition, though. On the rare occasions when I do take a day off, you *have* to make sure there's good weather.

Fifteen years later, history shows this coming together of East and West played out even better than could be expected, for both sides. By getting David H. Voorhees, CCM, CCE, to leave his position as General Manager of the prestigious, tradition-steeped Philadelphia Country Club, and switch coasts to work for what at the time was a much less well-known, 25-year-old property, Big Canyon landed the proven professional leader it needed to not only help it begin a strategic planning program, but carry through the plan's major initiatives in timely and spectacular fashion.

By 2009, the club had remodeled its golf course, completely rebuilt its 70,000-sq. ft. clubhouse facility, and raised its profile significantly as



Achievements

AT BIG CANYON COUNTRY CLUB

UNDER DAVID VOORHEES' LEADERSHIP

- Directed \$60M complete rebuild of 62,000-sq. ft. clubhouse (70,000 sq. ft. including covered walkways and dining terraces) while operating club for two years in temporary facilities during construction, with only 10% reduction in daily dining levels

Big Canyon CC has developed a striking new profile and changed the club landscape on the West Coast since bringing David Voorhees in from the cold.



Big Canyon Country Club

- Improvements and expansion of member dining increased number of daily member meals served on an annual basis by a third, to 125,000
- \$3.4M remodel of golf course and irrigation system completed on-time and on budget



SUBMITTED BY: CHEF XXXXXXXXX

a desirable Southern California club option. Thanks to Voorhees' detailed planning and direction, the club didn't even suffer much from operating out of temporary facilities during the two years of construction, with daily member dining levels staying at 90%.

Voorhees got his part of the bargain, too—no more snow or rain when he did find some time to break away from all that he was doing. Now, a day in the beach could really be a day at the beach.

He admits that a period of adjustment was needed, though, before the transition was complete. "It took a few years before I could bring myself to relax the buttoned-down, wing-tipped, pinstriped East Coast banker look," he says. "I can see now why some of the members and staff looked at me like I was from Mars after I first got here."

Voorhees earned something else as a result of bringing his talents to Newport Beach—recognition from his peers for all that he's accomplished at Big Canyon, as the 2010 recipient, in the Fewer than 600 Full-Privilege Members Category, of the Excellence in Club Management (ECM) Award co-sponsored by the McMahon Group and *Club & Resort Business*.

Strength from the Middle

In citing the attributes and attitudes that have helped him succeed in club management and earn the ECM distinction, Voorhees goes back to where it all began for him—in the middle of the country.



Big Canyon CC has developed a thriving Social membership to complement its Regular Equity base of 500 members.

"The strong sense of community and family ties that comes from growing up in a small Midwestern town [Chagrin Falls, Ohio] is at the core of my passion for country clubs," he says. "Clubs, after all, are first and foremost a community of families. When you see a member and his daughter take the first dance at her wedding reception and don't get choked up, you're in the wrong business. We serve from the heart."

Voorhees cites two other values drawn from his Ohio roots that have also served him well in the club management profession. "Manual labor associated with a family heavy-construc-

TODAY'S MANAGER

tion business began for me at a very young age, and helped shape the work ethic and energy that the hospitality industry requires," he notes. "And being a lifelong Cleveland Browns fan requires a tremendous measure of humility, as does private club management."

That humility, he adds, is needed not only to deal with daily challenges, but also to serve as an ongoing reminder about the club manager's role, no matter how much success may be achieved in the profession. "Club management has been referred to as 'leadership from behind,'" Voorhees notes. "We assist with developing the vision and are charged with the responsibility of achieving the resulting goals—but we must never mistake a strong sense of ownership with actual ownership. We are not a member."

C&RB



An exciting new club life is just now beginning for Big Canyon as it turns 40, with major projects now out of the way.

Ideas

IMPLEMENTED SUCCESSFULLY AT BIG CANYON COUNTRY CLUB

- Integrated wine preservation systems were designed into bars, to allow 25 premium wines to be served by the glass in 3-, 6-, and 9-oz. portions
- Computerized member recognition program is used by staff during slower periods, to practice learning about members (rewards given for successful recognition)
- "Just the Way You Like It" menus allow members to design orders with broad selection of proteins, accompaniments and sauces, and serve to significantly increase menu options without enlarging the menu
- "Wine and Tapas" events held Thursday evenings on The Dining Room terrace showcase the club's wine and culinary program—with no charge for what's served if a member stays for dinner
- "Pasta and Amore" events featuring made-to-order pizza and special pastas increased Tuesday evening cover counts by 20%

