JOHN DORMAN – LIFETIME EXCELLENCE AWARD

New York's Finest

The University Club of New York provided the perfect setting to honor the career and contributions of its longtime general manager.

Throughout this past April's Excellence in Club Management® (ECM) Awards reception and dinner (see "Honored by Their Peers," pg. 19), the elite gathering of managers from the nation's finest clubs was held in continuous awe of the elegant setting, exceptional food and impeccable service they enjoyed at The University Club of New York. Even those well aware of the sterling reputation of the club and its general manager, John Dorman, CCM, ECM, were amazed by how he and his staff once again demonstrated their ability to take an event to impressive new levels.

The night provided a special opportunity for everyone to express their appreciation, as the Awards concluded with the presentation of Lifetime Excellence honors for Dorman, who had announced his plans to retire in September 2025 after 28 years with the club. That presentation also proved to be the one thing that could momentarily pause the well-orchestrated flow of continuous service for the gala event, as staff members lined the back of the Main Dining Room to eagerly join in the ovation for Dorman as he received the recognition.

Lasting Impact

The staff's enthusiasm spoke volumes about the impact Dorman has had on not only The University Club, but also the people he has led and worked with throughout his career. His value to the club was first honored in 2012 as the winner of the ECM's Mel Rex Award, in recognition of the major turnaround he had helped to bring about since becoming general manager in 1997.

When Dorman started at the club, bringing experience as an executive chef and food-and-beverage manager at some of New York's most renowned hotels, it faced major indebtedness and needed to address how basic maintenance of its landmark multi-story midtown Manhattan building, which was built in 1899, had been seriously deferred. Dorman earned the Rex Award for directing over $45 million in capital expenditures in his first 15 years that restored the building's grandeur and functionality, while also growing the club's membership and upgrading its dining, recreational and lodging offerings to not only restore its financial health but accumulate ample cash reserves.

When making the introduction for his Lifetime Excellence recognition 13 years later, David Lifson, the club's immediate past president, made it clear that Dorman certainly hadn't rested on his first ECM laurels. Noting that the University Club has had only seven general managers since the position was created in 1892, and that Dorman would retire with the longest tenure of any, Lifson praised him for "facing and meeting many challenges, some expected and some never foreseen," and for steering the club through them all and continuing its advancement without ever compromising its standards and traditions.

In particular, how Dorman helped to guide The University Club through the pandemic was hailed as perhaps his most impressive contribution. "John literally moved into the club for six months and was the chief cook, bottle-washer and everything else, while we could only have a skeletal staff," Lifson said. "He was devoted 24 hours a day to doing all he could to preserve the club and get it through that time. As he always did, he worked tirelessly

to identify our needs, develop action plans and implement them to keep us on the path to constant improvement."

Putting Others First

Dorman also devoted time and energy during the pandemic to spearhead Employee Assistance Fundraising of over $900,000 to support affected club staff, reflecting his innate concern for others and how he has always prioritized team-related matters over personal considerations. As he did after winning the Rex Award (see photo, pg.22), he once again arranged for duplications of his Lifetime Excellence award to be distributed to staff members, to show his appreciation for their contributing roles behind each recognition.

The roots of Dorman's success and his emphasis on collaborative approaches with employees, colleagues and customers stem from his connection to his family's candy business, which began in the 1950s as Philip's Confections of Coney Island and remained a New York institution as Philip's Candy after relocating to Staten Island.

"Our happiness was based upon enjoying what we had and being a part of a family that supported one another," says Dorman, who began to work in candy production and sales at an early age and continued to help out at the store in his spare time as he advanced through his own career. "I learned my initial lessons then—not only about the importance of being friendly and doing nice things for people, but how great teams are needed to make great things happen."

What he learned about supportive environments also provided the impetus for Dorman's many contributions through the years to industry organizations and educational causes (see "Ongoing Legacy," above)—a passion he only plans to pursue more vigorously in the coming years.

"I may be playing the 'back nine' now, but I'm not at the 18th hole yet," he said as his retirement from The University Club approached. "I have many more things to do and I want to do whatever I can to support the industries and institutions that have been so good to me—and especially the people who are the greatest assets for providing experiences that have real value." ■

Ongoing Legacy

In addition to his many accomplishments at The University Club of New York, John Dorman's career has also been distinguished by his contributions to industry organizations and support of educational opportunities for aspiring club managers and culinary professionals.

In retirement, that legacy will carry on, most notably through two charitable vehicles that also honor the memory of his late wife, Andrea, who shared his commitment to the club industry, held a deep appreciation for people and community and participated in many professional and social organizations, both formally and informally.

The **John P. '78 and Andrea M. Dorman Endowed Scholarship** at the Culinary Institute of America provides need-based assistance for second-semester students at any CIA campus with an immediate family member who is a private-club employee. "The CIA provided me with the tools I needed to begin my career and helped in my development," Dorman said in an interview with the school. "The scholarship was created to give back to the industries and people that have meant so much to me in my career and personal life."

The **John and Andrea Dorman Fund** at The Club Foundation endows funds used to fuel the **John and Andrea Dorman Scholarship** that supports emerging leaders in the club industry by providing financial assistance to attend the Club Management Association of America's Business Management Institute (BMI). Contributions to the Fund can be made through The Club Foundation's website (*clubfoundation.org*).

"If I hadn't gone to BMI programs, I'm not sure how well I would have succeeded as a club manager," Dorman notes. "It rounds you out by helping you focus on areas beyond your core knowledge."