IAN MUNROE – THE MEL REX AWARD

Forward Process

By staying true to a succession of precise procedures, Ian Munroe has led Winter Park Racquet Club in an exciting new direction—and earned Excellence in Club Management® honors for himself.

As he accepted The Mel Rex Award during the ceremony honoring the 2026 recipients of the Excellence in Club Management® (ECM) Awards (see "Honored by Their Peers," below), Ian Munroe, CCM, ECM, cited six qualities "that have shaped my life and career":

- **Passion** (from seeing the devotion of his father, Dennis, to the club business and servant leadership over a 45-year career as a racquets director)
- **Patience** (from how his mother, Carolyn, was "the steady rock" while handling "the difficult assignment of being married to a club professional and raising [a family]")
- **Purpose** (from the inspiration and support provided by his wife Nicolette and daughter Amelia)
- **Persistence** (from lessons in professional development and career growth imparted by Rhett Robicheaux, CCM, the general manager while Munroe was the head tennis pro at Savannah (Ga.) Yacht Club, which helped him move into management positions at that club and then at The Landings Golf & Athletic Club in Savannah and Wexford in Hilton Head, S.C.)
- **Pride** (from the immediate impression he gained from Board President Rob Carter and other members, after becoming the new General Manager & COO of Winter Park (Fla.) Racquet Club (WPRC) in 2022, about the importance of "loving a place enough to do the difficult work needed to elevate it and serve every member family the way they deserve")

Munroe then finished his list of "the six Ps" with the word—**Process**—that he's relied on to direct the transformation and success story at WPRC that led to his ECM recognition.

"[I've been taught] to create strong processes, and then trust them," he said. "Stay disciplined. Do not flinch. Do not overreact. Do not abandon what you know is right, just because the road gets uncomfortable.

"That lesson has shaped the way I lead, the way I think, and the way I give advice to others," he added. "This whole club-career journey is a process—and if you surround yourself with good people, you will succeed, and have a lot of fun along the way!"

Honored by Their Peers

The Excellence in Club Management® (ECM) Awards were established by the McMahon Group, Inc., the St. Louis-based consulting firm, in 1997, and have been co-sponsored by the National Club Association since 2018.

The annual awards are selected through nominations submitted on behalf of qualified candidates by other parties. Award recipients are selected solely on the basis of their achievements at the club they currently manage.

Awards in these categories are given each year:

- **The James H. Brewer Award**, for a manager of a Country/Golf Club with more than 600 full-privilege members
- **The Mead Grady Award**, for a manager of a Country/Golf Club with fewer than 600 full-privilege members
- **The Mel Rex Award**, for a manager of a City, Athletic or Specialty (Non-Golf) Club
- **The John Furlong Award**, for excellence in management of a club property in Canada
- **The "Rising Star" Award** for an assistant club manager

Lifetime Achievement Awards for a retiring club manager are also included as part of some years' ECM honors.

A Selection Committee comprised of a peer group of leading club managers conducts the judging for the ECM Awards. A full listing of the judges, in addition to information on past winners and on how to nominate candidates for the 2027 awards, can be found at *clubmanageraward.com*.

The 2026 recipients of ECM Awards were honored at a special ceremony and dinner, sponsored by KOPPLIN KUEBLER & WALLACE, held during the National Club Conference at the Ocean Reef Club in Key Largo, Fla. Individual presentations are also made throughout the year at the winners' clubs.

Smoothing Out the Bumps

In his ECM nomination for Munroe, Rob Carter described just how bumpy the road had become in Winter Park by 2022. "WPRC had seven general managers in just ten years," he wrote. "This instability compounded into a severe lack of direction, leadership and focus, leading to a consistent decline in strategic thinking, facilities, services, financial performance and overall membership satisfaction, and [leaving] the staff in a cultural crisis with constant turnover.

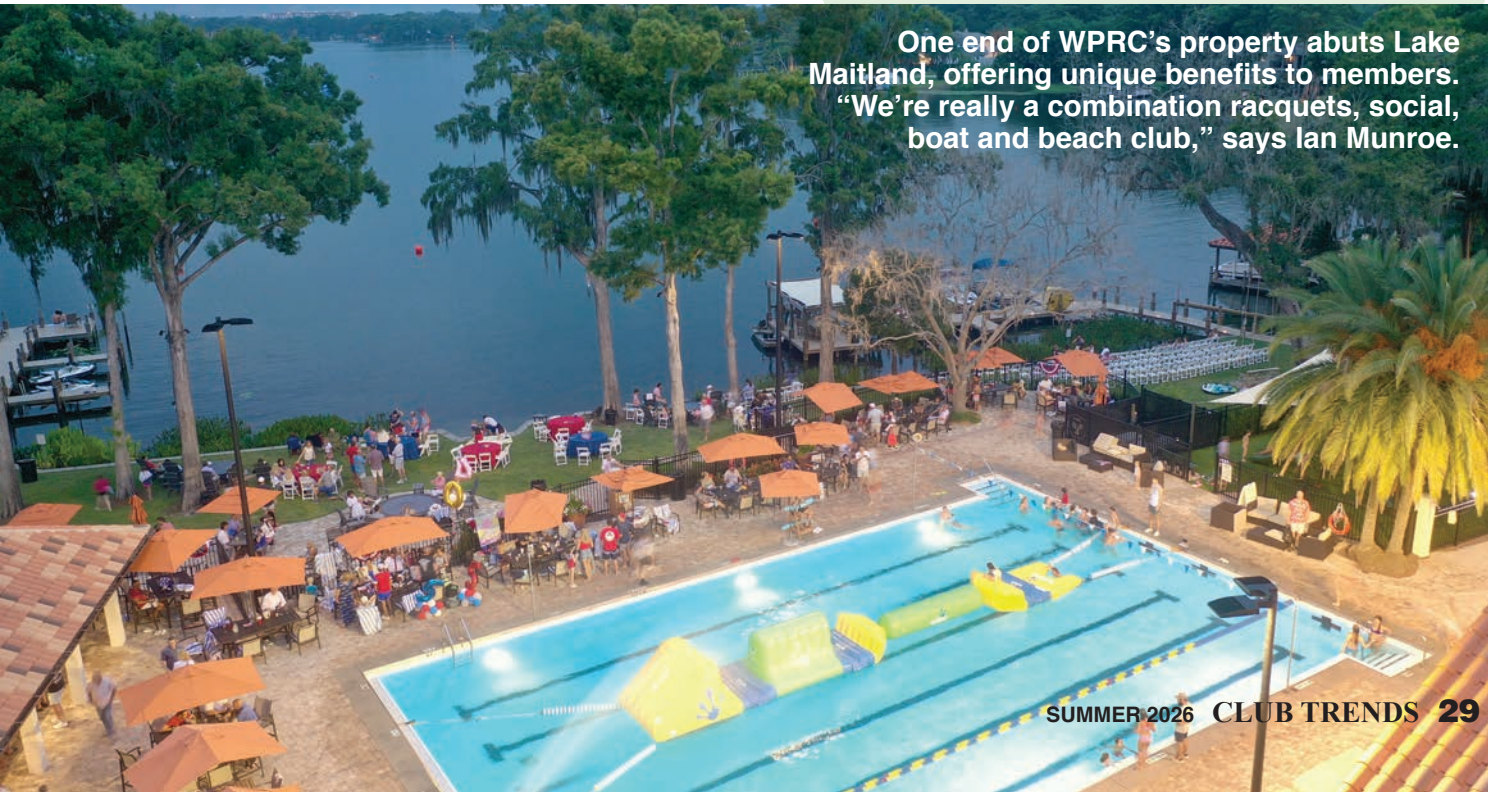
"We also had seven out of 10 years of significant

Ideas & Achievements

Implemented at Winter Park Racquet Club under Ian Munroe's Leadership

FOR FACILITIES

- $1.3 million in capital improvements completed in Munroe's first year as GM that included: four new pickleball courts with a dedicated social area; a state-of-the-art playground shaded by custom sails; new and expanded waterfront docks with an award-winning private dining deck (pictured) that's now billed as "the best table in Winter Park" and booked months ahead for Friday nights; three gas fire pits and seating areas; illuminated pools and deck lighting for expanded hours of nighttime swimming, and other enhancements of the club's waterfront area.
- $6 million "WPRC Forward" capital project, to be completed by the end of 2026, will include construction of a new Tuscany Center (named for Via Tuscany outside the club's entrance) housing a pro shop, a racquet sports-specific fitness/wellness center, coffee/smoothie bar, locker rooms, saunas and steam showers, a therapy/treatment room, offices, and a facilities maintenance center. Two existing buildings are also being renovated to add a new childcare center and players' lounge, along with a new event lawn and open-air event pavilion.
- 20-year capital reserve study commissioned to provide a roadmap for future asset replacement and maintenance.



One end of WPRC's property abuts Lake Maitland, offering unique benefits to members. "We're really a combination racquets, social, boat and beach club," says Ian Munroe.

Ian Munroe's hands-on approach (left) got WPRC's $6 million "Moving Forward" capital project started; it will be completed by the end of 2026 and include new fitness and pro shop areas (right) in a rebuilt Tuscany Center.

Ideas & Achievements

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FOR DINING

- Standards of Service Excellence program introduced to enhance the member dining experience, with feedback cards given to each member at each meal and also made available around the club and online. Within two months, over 1,000 feedback cards had been collected, leading to new training opportunities and enhancements to service quality that drove overall member-satisfaction scores out of the "Fair/Good" range into continuous "Very Good/ Excellent" standing.
- Drawing from the National Food & Beverage Calendar, successful new "food holiday" events, such as National Crepe Day and National Margarita Day, introduced.
- To address the inefficiencies of two dining outlets running 10 different menus a week, menu sales were analyzed and offerings were streamlined to three menus: Club Classics, Prix Fixe and Brunch. The Club Classics menu is tennis-themed and rotates five times a year, offering a wide variety of dishes for lunch and dinner. Prix Fixe, an upscale epicurean menu that rotates twice monthly and allows for culinary creativity, is available Wednesday through Friday and offers a three-course meal for $38, with the ability to order a la carte entrees.
- Menu consolidation reduced waste and lowered food costs by 15 percentage points.

operating losses, with no clear plan to stop the bleeding," Carter added. "Our dues didn't cover our expenses, leading to a lack of facilities maintenance and capital investment back into the club, because capital dollars were being used to subsidize operations, [creating] an overall rundown campus with no improvements on the horizon."

Those issues, Carter wrote, crystallized the club's four critical priorities and the profile of how its next GM would need to address them:

- **World-Class Service**: "We needed someone who knew what excellence looks like and how to get there."
- **Exceptional Culture**: "[We needed] someone who understood the history and traditions of an established club [WPRC was founded in 1953] and would not try and change our identity, but rather elevate and enhance it to its highest potential. Also, someone who had a track record of building teams and establishing a positive workplace culture that would give our employees reasons to stay and make this their career home, versus solely another short job stint."
- **Demographic Changes**: "[We needed] someone who could recognize the changing climate of the neighborhood and broader market and manage the expectations of our new and future members, while balancing them with tenured members' expectations and desires."
- **Strong Financial Performance**: "[We needed] someone who understood how to build realistic and attainable budgets and perform to them. Also, someone who could educate a board on the realities of running premier club operations and how to fund them, while at the same time staying ahead of capital maintenance, growing the balance sheet, and planning for future improvements."

A Process for Every Path

The "Ideas and Achievements" boxes presented throughout this article detail the many ways Ian Munroe set about demonstrating he was the right "someone" and developing a team and organization to deliver success in all needed areas.

"We're now a thriving, vibrant neighborhood club that's growing, evolving, and meeting the needs of our members in ways we never thought possible," Carter wrote in his ECM nomination. "Our members are proud to be part of what we're building here."

All that's been built—and is still to come—has been driven by a series of precise processes that confirm the description of Munroe in his ECM nomination as "a deeply instinctive, yet data-driven leader." They have included:

- **A strategic/master-planning process** that began by prioritizing listening through numerous "coffee

and conversation" meetings, one-on-ones with both members and staff, attending committee and board meetings, and spending time on the floor during service periods. The goal was to develop full understanding of the club's history, current direction, and members' future expectations—and from these conversations and observations, the need for a comprehensive membership survey became clear, to provide concrete data that could inform decision-making and strategy.

That survey yielded results highlighting critical areas requiring immediate attention, including facilities, food-and-beverage service and the dining experience, and staff turnover. Armed with this data, Munroe then worked closely with the WPRC board and senior staff to develop a clear roadmap for improvements, addressing both structural and operational issues.

■ To properly follow that roadmap and implement its initiatives, new processes were also needed to **assemble a trusted leadership team and develop operational procedures for measurable improvement**. Guidelines were set to ensure appropriate staffing levels across departments, and a structured training program aligned the staff with newly elevated service standards.

To foster genuine connections with staff members and encourage their commitment, professional development was prioritized and a culture of high energy, fairness and accountability was fostered. An emphasis was placed on tracking progress through key performance indicators to monitor growth, refine action plans, and drive continuous improvement.

■ A process was also put in place to **update WPRC's governance model** and create a framework for "meaningful member service, leadership development and [furthering] WPRC's mission and vision." Starting with a comprehensive bylaw review that added a member behavior section and created alignment with Florida statutes, it has continued with ongoing efforts to develop or enhance board and committee policies, charters, terms, roles and responsibilities, onboarding materials, and volunteer leadership programs.

Where the club once had 13 committees, a new streamlined structure has established a core group of five standing committees, including an Ambassador Committee designed as the primary tool for developing member participation. The core group is complemented by ad hoc committees created for a specific purpose or project and then dissolved when that assignment is completed.

Ideas & Achievements

Implemented at Winter Park Racquet Club under Ian Munroe's Leadership

FOR MEMBER EVENTS & SERVICES

■ Senior Social Committee created to develop Thursday night Speaker Series for TED talk-style events targeted at older members. Attendance for the 5 p.m. events helped to boost dining activity on the club's slowest nights, with attendees purchasing cocktails or wine and most staying for dinner.

■ With members voicing concerns about frequent club closures for private events that had grown to at least two Saturdays per month, those closures were eliminated to give weekends back to members and increase member utilization and overall revenue.

■ With a goal of ensuring that no open date would remain on the calendar, a one-year-in-advance social calendar was built, featuring a mix of family-themed events (Harry Potter Trivia, Alice in Wonderland Tea Parties, Indoor Putt-Putt) and all-inclusive adult concert parties (Yacht Rock, Country Classics, The Bee Gees, Sinatra Rat Pack, Phi Tappa Kegga, Beer Bourbon & BBQ, Margaritaville, Orlando Philharmonic). Cooking classes, family movie nights, campouts and holiday themes like the Halloween Spooktacular round out the schedule. The club's event revenue has risen from $183,000 in 2022 to $600,000 in 2025.

■ Youth-program participation has expanded from fewer than 60 children under 14 pre-COVID to over 225 currently. The Aquatics and Recreation Department was tasked with increasing the focus on summer camps and youth programming, leading to revenue growth from $32,000 in 2022 to $175,000 in 2025. A two-month schedule of camp programming—including Youth Camp, Aquatics Camp, Jr. Lifeguarding Camp, Tennis Camp, Tater Tot Camp, Pickleball Camp and Wake Surf Camp—now sells out months in advance.

■ A variety of complimentary member benefits have been implemented, including: sports drinks on tennis courts in new logoed colors; birthday meals for members and spouses; *hors d'oeuvres* in the Pub every Thursday and Friday; Wine Down Wednesday tastings; live music every Friday night at the pool and dining room; s'mores cart every weekend; ice cream for kids and alcoholic popsicles for adults at the pool; towel service at racquets courts and pool; valet service for club events.

(See box on Governance Ideas, below, for details.) Staff liaisons have now also been assigned to all committees, to ensure operational input and help to implement action plans and turn ideas into realities.

A Constant Thought Process

In addition to the support and contributions provided by WPRC members and staff from his first day in Winter Park, Munroe credits many other influences and mentors from earlier points along his career path for "sharpening me, challenging me and preparing me for responsibilities I once only hoped I might be ready for." The list includes Kevin Walters, Ryan Spence, CCM, and three fellow ECM recipients: Chris Coulter, CCM, ECM; Steven Freund, ECM, and Ray Kondziela, CCM, CCE, ECM.

While achieving excellence in club management "asks a lot of us and our families," Munroe adds, he still finds it to be a fulfilling profession "because at its best, it's not about buildings or spreadsheets or events—it's about building teams, creating memories, honoring tradition, making lives better in ways both big and small, and creating places that feel like home."

And while the completion of the $6 million "WPRC Forward" capital project by the end of 2026 will add many exciting new attractions and features for members and staff as they anticipate the club's 75th anniversary in 2028, Munroe and his team won't stop searching for more ways to answer what's been instilled as the daily mantra under his leadership: "What else can we do to make this club the members' favorite place to be and their first thought for everything they do?"

To Munroe, there will always be plenty of new possibilities to pursue. "We're called a racquets club," he says, "but we're really a combination racquets, social, boat and beach club—and we're open to anything that passes the litmus test of furthering our mission."

While WPRC operates in a tight physical footprint, that doesn't stop Munroe from musing how to fit in more new sports such as croquet or bocce, or new features such as food trucks. He also doesn't let potential staffing or equipment issues deter him from maximizing how members can fully enjoy the club's unique location along Lake Maitland, instead developing partnerships with outside companies to provide activities such as wakeboarding and sunset cruises.

"We want to create a journey from our entrance to our lakefront," he says. "And there's always more we can add." ■

Ideas & Achievements

Implemented at Winter Park Racquet Club under Ian Munroe's Leadership

FOR GOVERNANCE

- Comprehensive bylaw review conducted to align with Florida statutes and add a Member Behavior section.
- Thirteen committees streamlined to a core group of five standing committees, including an Ambassador Committee designed to create an accessible entry point for club service and support new-member integration, recruitment, culture-building and special service opportunities. The core group is complemented by a fluid group of ad hoc advisory committees that are convened for a single purpose, effort, event or project (e.g., Ladies Fashion Show, Construction Oversight, Boat Ramp/Docks) and dissolved when assignment is complete.
- Year-round Leadership Development/Nominating Committee further strengthens the pipeline for future committee and board service.

FOR FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

- Food-and-beverage revenues reached $3 million in 2025—a 49% increase from Munroe's arrival—for the first time in club's history, with month-over-month increases in cover counts and utilization.
- Aspirational capital account and capital reserve account were both fully pre-funded in advance of 2026. Capital reserves grew from $650,000 in 2022 to $2.4 million by end of 2025.
- Initiation fee doubled from $20,000 to $40,000 and dues increased 52% over two years.

FOR MEMBERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

- Director of Member Engagement position created to focus on onboarding and immersing new members in club activities, and two new Member Experience Coordinators hired to focus on "finding unique ways to make members smile on a daily basis."
- Fifty new members joined in 2024, with traction continuing in 2025 to reach the membership cap for the first time and establish a growing waitlist.

FOR INDUSTRY AND NATIONAL RECOGNITION

- WPRC's Annual Tennis Professional Exhibition, through which members enjoy front-row interaction with world-class players that have included Ben Shelton, John Isner and many others, is now recognized as one of the nation's top exhibitions. It draws six figures of revenue for the club in just four hours.
- Named a Distinguished Club of America (Exceptional Status) and a Platinum Club of America.

Ideas & Achievements

Implemented at Winter Park Racquet Club under Ian Munroe's Leadership

FOR COMMUNICATIONS

■ Creative Director hired (splitting previous role of Membership & Marketing Director) to lead marketing and communications efforts.

■ A renewed emphasis has been placed on video marketing. After each club event, a recap video is now posted within days, both as a celebration and a reminder for those who did not attend of what they missed. Recaps of club meetings are also produced, most notably for a Financial Town Hall that included information about the club's history, "Club Finance 101" and current financial challenges, and the path forward. For the "WPRC Forward" capital project, construction walkthrough videos were produced, culminating in a new podcast series, "A Fresh Club of Coffee," that discusses a variety of subjects and has helped to reach new audiences.

■ Department-specific communications and opt-in groups developed to allow members to only receive information aligning with their interests. Uniquely branded communications were created and sent on regular schedules, including:

- The Net Post (for Racquets)
- The Deep Dive (Aquatics)
- Booze News (all things beverage)
- Chef's Corner (all things food)
- WPRC Monthly (all-club newsletter)

FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT & APPRECIATION

■ Secured funding for dedicated staff restrooms, a break area with soft seating, TVs and kitchen essentials, and an enhanced meal program featuring seasonal menus.

■ To develop clear SOPs and consistent staff training programs, a Staff Engagement Manager role was created.

■ Staff training programs expanded to include First Responder and Lifeguard Training, Hurricane Preparedness and Response, and New Employee Orientation emphasizing the club's history, standards and culture.

■ G.R.E.E.T. program ("Greatness Requires Exceptional, Every Time") is emphasized to all staff members every day through lineups, pre-shifts and team meetings. Each employee now carries a G.R.E.E.T. card and each department focuses on one service point per week, encouraging staff to grow, highlight wins, and share ideas.

■ "Earn Your Racquets" program established for food-and-beverage service staff provides a framework for continued training, skills development and growth opportunities. The program outlines specific steps for classifying candidates during hiring, establishes initial compensation levels and timelines for pay increases, and sets the 10-step criteria for earning, within one year, a silver lapel pin of crossed tennis racquets that shows the recipient "has reached the highest level of professionalism in their role at WPRC." The final step requires "[writing] a one-page letter to the membership explaining how you will continue to embody the values of WPRC and create exceptional member experiences each day." Recipients who complete the program are elevated to a Racquets Pin pay rate and qualify for consideration for internal promotions into supervisory roles.

■ Partnered with University of Central Florida's Rosen School of Hospitality to create a Verified Internship Program through the Club Management Association of America. Two interns from the program are now pursuing full-time roles at WPRC.

■ Other programs implemented for staff recognition include Employee of the Quarter and Manager of the Year, three annual employee celebrations and annual department-head retreats. An Employee Engagement Manager role was created to facilitate these and other initiatives.

■ Voluntary turnover, especially in food-and-beverage department, virtually eliminated within a year.

■ Staff engagement surveys have shown increase in satisfaction from 50% to 90%.

■ *Indeed.com* ratings doubled from 2.4 to 4.8, ranking WPRC as a leading workplace in hospitality segment.

■ Named as one of the *Orlando Sentinel* Top Workplaces in the Orlando area for three consecutive years.