Well Played

Michael Ridout's full-circle route to Excellence in Club Management® recognition included stops at far-flung locations to add a variety of valuable skills and insights to his playbook.

The recognition of Michael Ridout, MBA, ECM, with the Excellence in Club Management® (ECM) Awards' 2026 John Furlong Award (see "Honored by Their Peers," pg. 28) capped a happy homecoming to his native Toronto, Ontario, where he was first introduced to the hospitality business with a job washing dishes while in high school.

In between that job and earning ECM honors through his four years of leadership and achievements as General Manager & Chief Operating Officer of the Toronto Cricket Skating and Curling Club, Ridout embarked on a two-decades-plus journey that included stops in Hawaii, the Caribbean, and Canada. Along the way, he immersed himself in a variety of roles at destination resorts and top-tier member clubs before homing in on club management as his profession of choice.

With a lifelong interest in golf, Ridout's journey began with a position with a golf course construction company. While that involved long hours and a lot of what Ridout recalls as "work in the trenches," it didn't dampen his enthusiasm for the golf industry, but did make him want to seek out a different way to be involved with it.

That led to formal study of golf course maintenance, after which Ridout landed a position as director of grounds for The Tryall Golf & Beach Club luxury resort in Montego Bay, Jamaica. From there he moved on to Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts and its Nevis Island Resort in the West Indies. As his experience and knowledge broadened, Ridout's interest and confidence in moving into

Ideas & Achievements

Implemented at Toronto Cricket Skating and Curling Club under Michael Ridout's Leadership

FOR GOVERNANCE

- Collaborated with senior leadership team to create a 4-Year Vision Map for club that has strengthened accountability, empowered decision-making and allowed the board to move forward with clarity and confidence.

FOR FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

- Helped to design and communicate a 38.7% dues adjustment that was a critical step in restoring the club's financial sustainability by properly funding the annual operating budget and preventing capital fees from being redirected to cover operating deficits. Thirteen financial information sessions were held to gain member support for moving forward with the new fee structure.

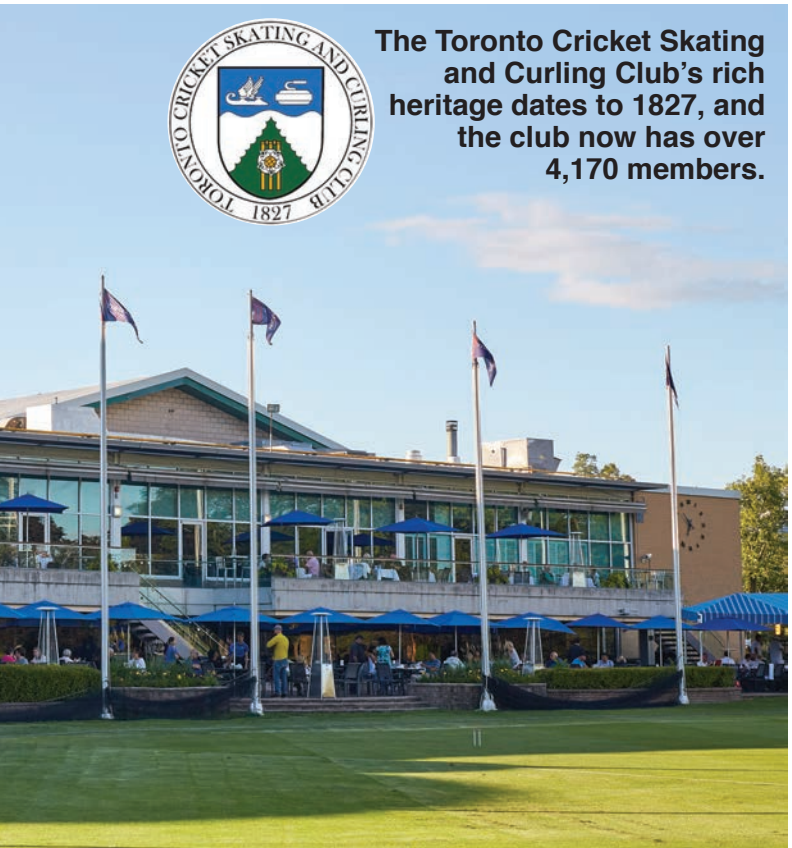
FOR MEMBERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

- Introduced One Club membership model and Universal Activity Fee to give members access to all 12 club activities under a single fee structure. A 100% increase in entrance fees has been gained since its rollout.
- Enhanced "Test the Waters" six-month trial membership program, leading to a strong conversion rate and resulting in greater engagement of new members who had already experienced the club's facilities, programs and culture.

club management grew, leading to his decision to return to Canada and earn his MBA in Hospitality & Tourism, with a club-management focus, from the University of Guelph.

"The defining themes of my career have been continuous learning and adaptability," Ridout says. "Leaving the Caribbean and Four Seasons to pursue my MBA was part of that journey, to build new skills and broaden my perspective."

MBA in hand, Ridout's journey resumed. Along the way, he admits, there were challenges and a few setbacks that sharpened his ability to "pivot and adapt." But eventually the circle was completed with successful engagements back in Toronto, before



The Toronto Cricket Skating and Curling Club's rich heritage dates to 1827, and the club now has over 4,170 members.

Ideas & Achievements

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FOR DINING

- Championed 40% expansion of Family Bistro seating and introduced standalone "Bistro to Go" outlet to enhance both convenience and social vibrancy.
- Outdoor-dining events strengthened to drive member engagement and enjoyment throughout the season, with some events drawing between 400 and 800 members and guests.

- Strong uptick in casual dining generated through bi-weekly theme nights on Main Street that feature live cooking stations on the club's main thoroughfare, holiday-focused events celebrating the club's diverse cultures, sports-themed events, and expansion of mocktails and healthier beverage options as part of non-alcohol menu engineering and enhancement.
- Formal dining sustained at strong levels through monthly prime-rib dinners and international theme nights, holiday and cultural events, the Dinner and a Speaker series, and wine dinners.

- Number of banquet-style events and club-member dining opportunities doubled in four-year period.
- Introduced "Wilson," a "full-time" server assistant robot, to run food efficiently to the family dining restaurant, as a feature enjoyed by children of all ages.

FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT

- "Well Played" Service Model introduced and embedded across all departments, as a central element for elevating the daily member experience through an emphasis on being Prompt, Personalized and Polite.
- Created a Learning & Development Manager position to focus on staff development, leadership education and succession planning.
- "Adopt the Leader's Mindset" program initiated to provide development for senior leaders and dining supervisors.

taking his position with what is known affectionately by locals as simply "The Cricket Club" in 2022 (the club's cricket section will celebrate its 200th anniversary in 2027). "Returning to Toronto allowed me to become more grounded in the final chapters of my career," Ridout says.

Taking Notice

In nominating him for ECM Award recognition, Toronto Cricket's President, Ian Matthews, and Immediate Past President, Paul Uys, noted how Ridout's "impressive track record of elevating performance and member experience at leading Canadian clubs" played an important role in the decision to hire him as GM/COO.

The "Ideas and Achievements" boxes included with this article detail the many ways that Matthews and Uys then credited Ridout with "[guiding] our club through major changes with outstanding leadership" in his tenure since arriving. In their nomination letter, they cited three "pillars [where] Mike has consistently demonstrated excellence":

- **People and culture**—building a high-performance, member-centric team.
- **Product and member experience**—modernizing while respecting tradition.
- **Financial stewardship**—restoring stability and ensuring long-term sustainability.

"What separates Mike as a leader," the nomination added, "is the way he contributes well beyond the day-to-day responsibilities of running a club." Ridout's extensive volunteer work for sports-related causes including Wheelchair Rugby Canada and the Homeless World Cup, along with his contributions to club-industry organizations, were credited with "helping to shape his leadership approach, particularly around communication, accountability, and developing people."

As a competitive cyclist himself, Ridout also draws from that activity to further refine his approach to "life and leadership." Similar to what's required for success in team cycling, he says, those behind the operation of great clubs also need to "find the right cadence and tempo, learning when to sit back and when to push on, and when to pace yourself for the long effort. As every cyclist knows, the win belongs to the whole team."

"Looking back, the themes of learning and adaptability are what make receiving the John Furlong Award so humbling," Ridout reflects. "To me, it is recognition of the collective effort, growth, and commitment to people, culture, and club excellence that has shaped my journey." ■

Ideas & Achievements

Implemented at Toronto Cricket Skating and Curling Club under Michael Ridout's Leadership

FOR MEMBER ACTIVITIES & EVENTS

- Sports and recreation offerings expanded from 9 to 12 activities, with additions including pickleball, padel (pictured) and indoor golf.
- Launched "One Club Olympics" to encourage participation across all 12 club activities. The unique, single-day event opens the club exclusively for participants and welcomes both family and mixed teams.
- Created a Junior Social Committee, led by a 16-year-old member, to support a growing Junior membership by shaping new programming such as a 5-on-5 basketball league and ensuring that activities reflect a junior perspective.
- Introduced six-week structured triathlon training program to give members a reason to engage in multiple sports and increase cross-activity participation.

FOR CLUB CULTURE

- Broadened the club's focus on diversity, accessibility, inclusion, respect and community through initiatives including adaptive sports offerings such as wheelchair curling and Squash 57 (a wheelchair racquet sport played on a standard squash court using a larger, bouncier ball and a shorter racquet with a bigger head).

FOR FITNESS/WELLNESS

- High-performance conditioning and wellness programming added, including mental coaching, nutritional guidance and specialized workshops to support holistic member wellness.

FOR FACILITIES

- Upgraded major areas of club facilities with high-efficiency lighting and pursued cool-roof incentives to reduce energy consumption and support a more comfortable environment for members and staff.
- Continued to transition club's operating equipment toward electric alternatives and advanced initiatives aimed at lowering greenhouse gas emissions across multiple departments.
- Built out asset-management expenditure program and plan through 2044.