

The Future Customer Is Who?

IT HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY EVIDENT THAT OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS, WE HAVE SEEN A CULTURAL CHANGE IN THE WAY MEMBERS ARE BEING ATTRACTED TO CLUBS.

As I speak to club executives and board members from around the country, and listen to them lament the challenges they are experiencing in the membership area and the struggle they are having in attracting new, younger members...one thing is certain...there is a cultural change that is happening right before our eyes!

In thinking about the membership challenges so many clubs are experiencing, it occurred to me that perhaps club leadership hasn't tried to

fully understand who its potential members really are. Perhaps they haven't paid attention to the person who is most important in making that decision...the 40 to 50 year old female!

In asking why the 40 to 50 year old female, and why leadership has not paid any attention, I'll answer the second question first – Because older men who do not understand that times have changed, predominantly control most of the club boardrooms around the nation.

On a daily basis, I debate with many of my older male members about today's changing culture, and the fact that it is the female who makes most of the family decisions.

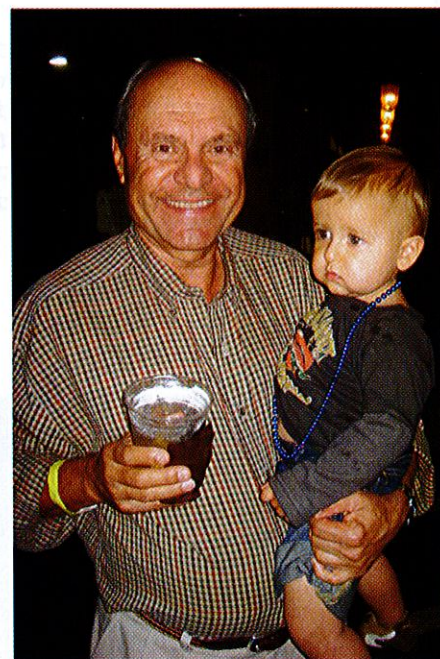


MICHAEL MCCARTHY
CEO/GENERAL MANAGER
ADDISON RESERVE COUNTRY CLUB

They reply, "Baloney! I still rule my roost"!

But, when I pose the question, "Is it your sons and sons-in-law or your daughters and daughters-in-law who rule the roost in their families? a light goes off in their heads and there's quite a different response!"

They agree that it's their daughters and daughters-in-laws who were



making most of the family decisions. Why, you ask? It's not because the younger men are wimps; it's because society has changed dramatically over the last 20 years.

Females have become increasingly more career-oriented. It's no longer about getting married, having children, and staying home. Rather, it's about getting a college education including advanced degrees, having a career, and then starting a family. In fact, in many cases, we have learned that the females are earning equally as much or more than their husbands.

Understanding that, we find that today's generation of parents share joint responsibility for all family matters. It's just as much Dad's responsibility to be at a school event or a sporting event as it is Mom's.

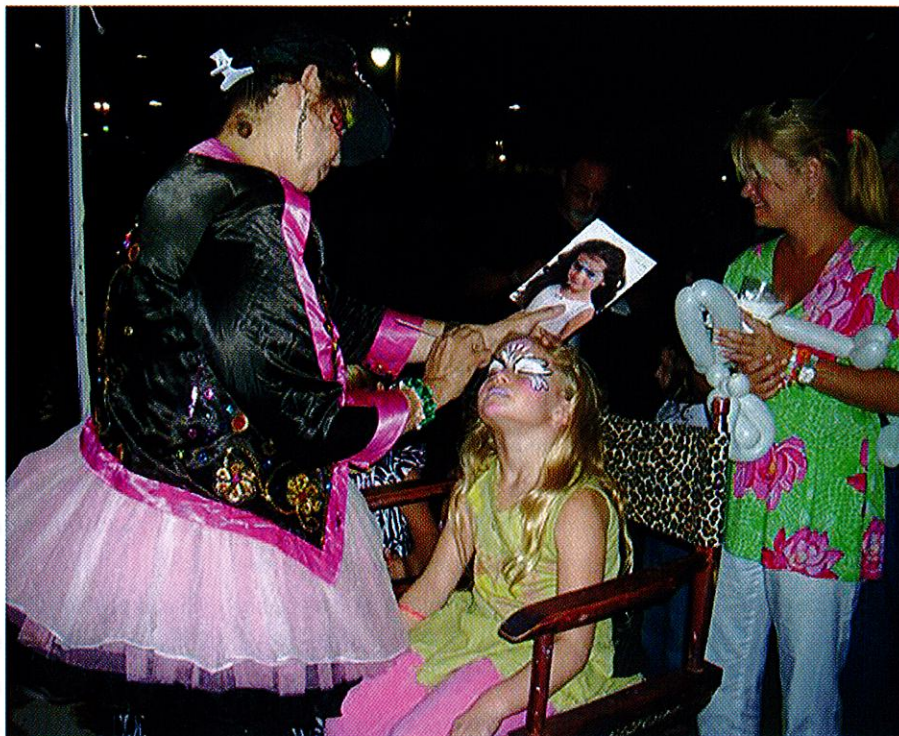
As a club, what do we do about this changing culture? It's not just about being family friendly or female friendly. It's not about tolerating kids and wives in jeans in the dining room, or about redecorating the dining room to do more catering to offset dues.

It's about the total cultural and structural change to the club environment that is happening right before our eyes! It's about building facilities that the 40-50 year old female is looking for, such as top-flight fitness facilities with lots of free group instruction, elegant full service spas that include hair, nails, facial and massage services.

It's about offering free daycare so mom or dad can drop the kids while they use these services. It's about casual dining offerings where they feel welcome with their children and not uncomfortable with their children.

THE CULTURE

However, building a facility just doesn't do it! We must accommodate the changing culture! Are you encouraging members to get



ACTIVITIES DURING ADDISON RESERVE'S STREET FAIR AND CLUB PRESIDENT FERNANDO LEAL WITH HIS GRANDSON, CONNOR

involved in the community? Having a membership fully committed to this concept first will do it!

Family activities should not be activities that happen just during the holidays. Would you ever think of abolishing your club's formal New Years Eve party, and replacing it with a Casual Island Street Fair? Probably not! Let me tell you what happened with our experience, because we did it!

Typically, over the years, 100 members would attend our formal black tie affair. For the last three years, our street fair attendance has grown from 600 to 800 and now to 1,000 members and families participating. Would you take that chance?

I'm not sure club leadership would be willing to take on the potential criticism or risk. But, if you sit back and don't try to do things a little differently, your business will continue to spiral out of control. The club industry is desperately looking for pro-active leadership, not re-active leadership.

Understand who your future customer is by recognizing our changing culture. Then, start to strategically plan with your board and your membership, and maybe there is still hope to turn this industry around.

These principles have worked well for Addison Reserve. With the opening of our new facilities and offerings to attract the younger member, our revenues have increased from \$15.8 million to \$21 million in a three-year period. Those are staggering numbers and even more impressive when considering the down economy! **BR**

Michael McCarthy is Chief Executive Officer and General Manager, Addison Reserve Country Club, Delray Beach, FL

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