

THE BOARDROOM

CELEBRATING 22 YEARS OF EDUCATING THE PRIVATE CLUB INDUSTRY

ISSUE 274 | VOLUME XXII JANUARY/FEBRUARY



Distinguished Clubs
from **BOARDROOM**
magazine

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION FOR THE
ASSOCIATION OF PRIVATE CLUB DIRECTORS



Distinguished President of the Year

Keith Berk
Northmoor Country Club

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Northmoor's Keith Berk

BOARDROOM MAGAZINE'S DISTINGUISHED CLUB PRESIDENT FOR 2017

Keith came into his presidency with a long and aggressive list of goals. Incredibly, he accomplished every one. His leadership will be felt by future boards and the membership for many years to come.

– Jeffrey A. Wellek, Northmoor board member.

And so goes the recognition of Keith Berk at Northmoor Country Club in Chicago, Illinois, upon his selection as *BoardRoom's Distinguished Club President for 2017*.

BoardRoom magazine this year is recognizing 21 *Private Club Presidents of the Year – 2017*, for practicing what they preach – leadership for the betterment of their clubs – board presidents or chairs who serve as the volunteer leaders of their club.

It's the 10th year the industry's top private club presidents have been honored by *BoardRoom* magazine for their outstanding work.

"We accepted nominations and applications from many different clubs for 2017 and are honoring 21 club presidents from the U.S., South Africa and New Zealand," explained *BoardRoom* magazine's publisher and CEO John Fornaro.

"Our selection of the top 20 presidents and Keith Berk as our *Distinguished Club President* signifies another successful search for leaders who have contributed so much to their private clubs and their member experience.

"President Berk has led his club through a calculated change in the club's management structure that bodes well for the club's future," Fornaro added.

The impetus for *BoardRoom's* top president recognition program comes from its sponsors, the *Association of Private Club Directors*, the parent organization of *Boardroom* magazine, and *Kopplin Kuebler & Wallace*, one of the country's leading private club industry consultants.

"This is a wonderful achievement for Keith Berk," acknowledged Gordon Welch, president of the APCD.

"Congratulations. The Association of Private Club Directors (APCD) is thrilled to recognize this outstanding achievement and award," he added.

"Kopplin, Kuebler & Wallace has been fortunate over the past number of years to partner with *BoardRoom* magazine in recognizing the dedicated individuals who are willing to serve their club as president," expressed Dick Kopplin, partner in KK & W with Kurt Kuebler and Tom Wallace.

"Our travels allow us to meet with dozens of club presidents every year and we're always impressed with their level of commitment to the betterment of their clubs. That's why we are so happy to assist *BoardRoom* in honoring these unpaid volunteers who give so much of their time to improving the governance and management at the clubs they love," intoned Kopplin.

"We are pleased to see the recognition of Keith Berk as *BoardRoom's Distinguished Club President of the Year* because he embodies so many of the qualities we see in outstanding club presidents. He is someone who listens to his fellow board members and just as importantly to the club members.

"Additionally, he is continually interested in improving the club by working with his management team to enhance every department in the club. No question, Keith Berk has demonstrated the quintessential characteristics you would hope for in an outstanding club president," explained Kopplin.

Keith demonstrated great leadership while guiding our club through structural change. His vision and wisdom carried influence as we overcame challenges and obstacles. Keith's calm and thoughtful manner were present at all times throughout his presidency."

– David Bercu, board member

Change is a long story at Northmoor, a club that had operated successfully under a decentralized management structure for 98 years.

"Our general manager, in charge of our clubhouse operations, reported to the board. Our head golf professional, grounds and greens superintendent, head tennis pro, head platform tennis pro and several other of our managers reported to board members who chaired committees, not to a general manager. This structure was well engrained at Northmoor," Berk explained.

However, that was about to change as the club, in 2015, with its own search committee, embarked on a search for



*Distinguished
President*

an assistant clubhouse manager. The position was filled but it quickly became apparent that the club didn't have the right structure to create a successful experience. So, back to the drawing board.

Berk, after discussions with Kopplin Kuebler & Wallace became convinced that the clubs' decentralized management was "no longer optimal." Because of the size of the club and the specific management challenges, he began to realize that it was time to change the governance model.

"The challenges to change it, however, were great," Berk expressed. "First, our general manager, at the time, had been struggling to build a clubhouse management team and did not have the experience to take on a broader job of general manager/COO of all operations. We would have to hire a new general manager/COO.

"Secondly, I would have to gain support of my executive committee, then our board and ultimately our membership. And, most importantly, we would have to do all of this without alienating and possibly losing our department heads and key managers," Berk cautioned.

Berk went to work, first educating the executive committee on the merits of the GM/COO concept and then discussing these ideas with the entire board. After getting the buy-in from the board he advocated the benefits of this management model to the entire membership.

Berk recognized that a key part of the success in converting to a true GM concept would be to get "buy-in" from the senior management team. He participated in discussions with the key department heads to explain why it was time for the change.

"Northmoor enjoys a unique culture where our board members like and respect each other and our membership has confidence and trust in the board. When presented with well thought-out positions supported by industry data, the changes we suggested were accepted with less controversy than I expected," Berk added.

Berk also knew success would be subject to finding the right individual to lead the club through this transition and he found that person in general manager David Derfel, whom the club hired in December 2016. Keith worked closely with GM Derfel and the management team through the entire transition process.

"The changes to Northmoor are significant," Berk intoned. "They are in part because of our new structure and in part because of all that David has brought to Northmoor.

"Under our David's leadership, we began the process of transitioning Northmoor from a series of well-run silos to a club with professional management, a centralized vision and a coordinated management team. David has focused on building a high quality sustainable staff in an environment that is highly seasonal.

"As the GM, David has helped guide me to focus our board on strategic issues rather than running the club's

day-to-day operations. One example is a bylaw change that directs member concerns about everyday service issues to David, rather than the historic practice of contacting one of the board members," Berk continued.

The *Distinguished Club President* feels the general manager/COO structure also will benefit Northmoor in the future in numerous ways, including:

- Weekly management meetings that allow for a coordinated and more consistent service offering throughout the club.
- Better efficiency in using all club resources to meet seasonal needs and peak needs.
- More centralized purchasing
- Allowing the board to focus on strategy not operations, and
- More opportunities throughout the club for employees to grow their careers.

ADDITIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS

"It's all about the member experience," signifies the theme of Keith Berk's presidency, and this is given consideration for every action the club's board takes.

"Hiring David Derfel as our GM/COO remains the most significant achievement of my presidency and the most meaningful to Northmoor now and for the future," Berk expressed.

Additional achievements that mark Keith Berk's tenure as Northmoor Country Club president, include:

- Amending and restating Northmoor's bylaws to modernize many antiquated aspects. This included allowing up to two spousal members on the board, eliminating two board positions and replacing them with a *historian chair* and a *philanthropic chair*, streamlining the club's communications and lead times by implementing email communications, and simplifying and making more fair the club's disciplinary process
- Converting the club's member billing and most other communications to email
- Converting member payments to ACH
- Converting holiday bonuses for key department heads and key managers to a performance-based bonus plan
- Initiating the club's first-ever board strategic planning meeting
- Achieving 95 percent member approval for a special assessment for new golf course bunkers, and
- Revised senior dues to accommodate aging member demographics.

As Keith's vice president, I have worked side by side with him. Keith ran concise and focused meetings resulting in significant and much-needed changes to our bylaws and management structure. Fiscal responsibility also has been central to all decisions. 'It's all about member experience' is the new mantra of our board leadership, thanks to Keith Berk.

— Doug Adler, board member



First Generation Member Named BoardRoom's Distinguished Club President

Keith Berk, BoardRoom magazine's Distinguished Club President for 2017, had no earlier experience or involvement with country clubs until joining Northmoor Country Club in 2001.

But these days, he's right in the thick of it. When Keith joined Northmoor he knew several members but his closest friends were not members of country clubs. Shortly afterward, Keith sponsored his brother for membership.

Today, Keith's closest friends are members of Northmoor whom he travels with for golf and other adventures. During this past year, through the marriage of Keith's nephew's (his brother's son) to the daughter of a Northmoor member, Keith is now related to a lot of Northmoor members!

Keith and Janna, his wife of more than 33 years, have three children – Joey who will be pursuing a master's degree in industrial and organizational psychology in the fall at Northwestern University, David, an associate at a private equity

firm in New York and Annie, an analyst at the private bank of JP Morgan in New York.

Berk, a senior partner at the Chicago law firm Horwood, Marcus & Berk Chartered, joined the firm in 1985 and has grown the firm from five attorneys to 55 attorneys and more than 100 employees. Keith is a commercial lawyer specializing in mergers and acquisitions, and counselling larger sized middle market businesses on entity structures and organizational incentives for growth and equity appreciation.

Keith has been a member of the Young Presidents Organization (YPO Gold-Chicago) since 1995 and is a member of Mizner Country Club in Delray Beach Florida since 2009. **BR**

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Keith exemplifies the word 'leadership.' He sets out the objectives, encourages discussion, builds a consensus, and delivers a solution & action plan. Keith accomplished a tremendous amount during his tenure as president and his prior service as an officer and director. The club has been lucky to have Keith Berk as its president, and it's been an honor to serve alongside him."

- Bill Lewin, board member and former president

Keith is a good listener and asks great questions. He has a unique ability to get to the root of issues and focus on solutions.

- Rob Razowsky, board member

MICROMANAGEMENT BE GONE!

In general manager Derfel's mind, President Berk's participation in the CMAA's pre-conference workshop, Executive Leadership at a Higher Level, presented by KK & W, reinforced his belief and commitment that the club's board needed a 'thought partner' who handles the club's day-to-day operations while allowing the board to focus on 'big picture' strategic issues.

"Northmoor Country Club in 2017 held its first ever board retreat to begin the process of developing core values that define the culture and decision-making process, a mission statement and a vision statement," explained GM Derfel, referring to change inspired by the club's shift in its governance model.

"No longer does the board feel obligated to micromanage department heads, and I think there's a sense of relief that 'GM David' will handle 'those things' so the board can focus on ensuring Northmoor remains relevant in future years.

"Keith brings a level of respect, wisdom, and positive energy to the boardroom that sets the tone for highly productive meetings. Healthy debate is encouraged, and Keith makes sure that everyone's opinion is heard," Derfel added.

"He's always quick to remind everyone that decisions the board makes should be founded on their merit to benefit the greater good of the entire membership and never a particular constituency. Keith established a true forum for open and honest expression that always focused on 'it's all about the member experience.'

"Change doesn't come easy and being tasked with the challenge to become the first GM/COO in the almost 100-year history of Northmoor has its fair share of ups and downs," Derfel expressed.

"But Keith Berk has been a pillar of support and an extraordinary collaborator in this first year of transition. His leadership and ability to affect positive change is inspiring and has provided me with the confidence and conviction that we are moving in the right direction."

*All reasons why Keith Berk, president of Northmoor Country Club, stands as BoardRoom magazine's Distinguished Club President for 2017. **BR***

2017 Top Private Club Presidents of the Year

Private club board presidents play a huge role in the professional operations of their club as volunteers working diligently with their board of directors and general managers, striving for well informed, but not emotional decisions.

BoardRoom magazine's 21 most outstanding private club presidents for 2017, including the selection of Keith Berk of Northmoor Country Club as the **Distinguished Club president for 2017**, exemplifies the focus on the leadership responsibilities, the accountability and the management of the board, while providing a healthy respect for the club's macromanagement.

These board presidents, chosen from clubs in the United States, South Africa and New Zealand, understand the importance of working, effectively and efficiently, with their volunteer boards and the dedication that's required from everyone with whom they work.

They practice what they preach – outstanding leadership to maintain best practices and an extraordinary member experience for their members clubs. Systems alone do not insure a good board. Key elements include commitment, competence, diversity, collective decision making, openness, transparency, effective communication with management and the membership, fiscal responsibility, development and establishment of the club's mission, vision and policy direction, especially through establishment of a strategic plan.

Successful board presidents draw upon the expertise of other board members, the club's institutional memory and stewardship of the club's resources. As well, board presidents provide new board members and future presidents with information they need to perform effectively as board members.

Congratulations to BoardRoom's outstanding private club board presidents for 2017.

Keith Berk	Northmoor Country Club	USA	
Jeffrey Benton	River Bend Golf and Country Club	USA	
Tom Brunts	Country Club At Castle Pines	USA	
Cleve Christophe	Thornblade Club	USA	
Rocco Diina	The Buffalo Club	USA	
Lou DiLorenzo	Interlachen Country Club	USA	
Ken Donovan	Fiddler's Elbow Country Club	USA	
Garth Elliott	Randpark Golf Club	South Africa	
Doug Green	The Polo Club of Boca Raton	USA	
Grant Hendricks	Southward Ho Country Club	USA	
Steve Irwin	St. Andrews Country Club	USA	
Ray Kayne	Tara Iti Golf Club	New Zealand	
George Lantz	Glenmoor Country Club	USA	
John Lyngaas	Grey Oaks Country Club	USA	
Frank Maddalena	Boca Grove Golf and Tennis Club	USA	
Ian Murdoch	Bryanston Country Club	South Africa	
Michael Neglia	Upper Montclair Country Club	USA	
Jack Peat	The Club at Morningside	USA	
Mark Sabine	Mission Viejo Country Club	USA	
Judith Stant	Collier's Reserve Country Club	USA	
Joseph J. Thomas	Belle Haven Country Club	USA	

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