

Aspirations & Inspirations

An exclusive interview with Kevin Carroll - CMAA President 2011
By Dave White, editor

It's an interesting web we weave as our aspirations and inspirations take us through life.

Take for instance, Kevin Carroll, CCM, general manager of Loxahatchee Club, Jupiter, FL and recently elected president of the Club Managers Association of America.

His aspirations and inspirations have played a huge role in his 30-plus year career in the private club industry and as a member of CMAA.

"My brother Mike got me started in this crazy, wonderful business almost 40 years ago. While working as a line cook at a local Ramada Inn in St. Joseph, Missouri, Mike asked me to come and wash dishes. I was about 14, long before anyone cared about minimum age requirements," Carroll recalled in a recent interview.

"The work seemed easy enough... a few dishes and glasses to put through a machine, then 9 o'clock rolled around.

"The steam table was broken down...I faced mountains of pots and pans, caked with baked on lasagna, mac and cheese and everything else on the menu. It was well after midnight when my dad picked me up...

His "introduction to the world of hospitality...and the start of a 30-year journey" has taken Kevin to a pinnacle...CMAA's president for 2011.

"I always enjoyed politics and aspired to be a city manager," Kevin related, "but before long my brother Mike, a graduate from the Culinary



Institute of America and chef at the St. Joe Country Club, had me washing dishes, flipping burgers and bartending. I decided to follow in his footsteps and enrolled at CIA.”

After graduating, Kevin launched his culinary career as a cook at Belle Meade Country Club in Nashville. But that didn't last long either before brother Mike came calling again.

As manager at a swim-tennis club in Kansas City, Mike needed an assistant manager, so Kevin in 1980 made the move to the front of the house and joined CMAA the following year, 1981...30 years ago.

Aspirations change!

“My career's taken more than a few turns, but CMAA's been there for me,” Kevin observed. At age 25, Kevin took his first GM job...managing an alumni club on campus at the University of Kansas.

“My CMAA education has been imperative to my success,” says Kevin, who moved to Loxahatchee almost seven years ago.

“My leadership skills developed and sharpened as I served as a CMAA chapter leader and the Mid America Chapter president.”

Now Carroll, as CMAA president, faces some of the most challenging issues of his career.

“My number one goal is to grow CMAA's membership. We are no different than any industry out there. The club industry has taken a hit just like every other and likewise the membership in CMAA has declined slightly. We need to build upon the membership we have; so jumping on board with the membership program we have underway is vitally important,” Carroll opined.

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“In talking to managers around the country, people my age (53) have said that we've gone through so much. We've gone through all the BMI programs, we've learned a lot, and we go to conference.

“But we really need higher-level, more executive level education. I'm not sure what that is yet but we need to seek that out, and follow through with our managers,” he added.

This dovetails with Carroll's thoughts of what CMAA's members need to more effectively deal with private club boards and committees.

“Our members need a good well-rounded education in most areas of the club but they need leadership development so they can lead their clubs. They (our general managers) need to be the ones in the boardroom and committees leading those committee and board discussions.

“They need to be an active participant. They need to be very active forming those agendas with the president and the committee chairman. They have to take a very proactive role. They are the professionals.

When asked how he would deal more effectively with the education of the board of directors, Carroll replied:

“I think the manager has to set that example. Board orientations are vital.

“The role of the board is policy making. The board should set and approve policy for the manager and the management team to carry out. The day-to-day decisions on running the club should be left to the general managers and their staff.

“The board president and the GM have to be on board with what they see as the role of the board...the role of the GM, and that needs to be communicated to the entire board so everyone is well aware of what each others roles and responsibilities are.

“If that requires a retreat or that requires a facilitator to come in that is vitally important,” he explained.

“When members come on the board, they want to do something for their members. Oftentimes the best thing is to be a

voice of communication for the club, and how the club operates, how the club decisions are made and reinforce the idea that they have a great professional staff that runs the club.

“We can always learn something from our boards. General managers are very lucky because board members are some of the best and brightest corporate minds and entrepreneurs out there. We can learn from those people.

“They may not know club business but they know busi-

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ness and if we can meet with them one-on-one and talk about the business itself, and then have the GM share what they know about the club industry maybe there can be a meeting of the minds.

“You are always going to have individuals who micromanage, they may have micromanaged their own corporation or business but that is where the general manager has to show they are strong and can manage the club.

“When a new board member comes in, it’s a terrific time to have a board orientation. My board president and I sit down with new board members and go through the entire policies and procedures manual about how the club is managed.

“We go through bylaws and all those house keeping issues. We bring in each individual department manager and we give them 10 minutes to talk about their unit of business and how they manage that business from the budget to the hiring to purchasing. We really show board members that we do run businesses. That’s vitally important.”

Carroll’s got other items on his ‘to do’ list this year.

“Growing the CMAA membership is most important,” Kevin reiterated. “We really want to make the chapters stronger and more vital. Many people only see CMAA at the local level, they may not come to national conferences so we need to make sure we have a really strong local chapter process.

“Working with staff I’d like to have each CMAA board member take four to six chapter presidents under their wing and communicate with them on a regular basis...and let them know what’s happening with CMAA, what initiatives, what programs are underway and really reach out to them and ask, ‘what can we do to help you do your job better?’

“We’re also going to review CMAA’s election process because our own election procedures may be an obstacle to our own

success. Contested elections can be contentious and divisive and CMAA deserves the best leadership we can provide.

“Our long range planning committee will also review our code of ethics for clarity and purpose.

It’s been an interesting trip for Kevin Carroll, who as a young man harbored aspirations of “being a city manager and breaking into politics.”

“I met my wife Lisa at the University of Kansas. We’ve been married 24 years. I’ve been a CMAA member 30 years. So when we were dating she knew what the schedule was, knew I worked nights, weekends and holidays. She knew what she was in for.

“But she’s been my inspiration...has broadened my horizons and opened the world to me in ways I never would have imagined.”

As did brother, Mike, who helped get Kevin’s private club journey started.

And for his aspirations: “I’m at Loxahatchee, not just a gated community and club, but a small city of 285 residents with all the politics anyone could hope for. My dream of being a city manager is complete.”

The journey, aspirations and inspirations continue. **BR**

