

SKIP AVERY

CMAA PRESIDENT 2012

A Profile in Courage, Humility and Service

COVER STORY BY RICK COYNE
COVER AND COVER STORY PHOTOS BY JACK WOLF, WOLF PHOTOGRAPHY

Spanning a private club career of over 30 years, the story of who Skip Avery, CCM, CCE, is and what he stands for, is far greater than the sum of his years of service.

For those that have the privilege of knowing him, this lumbering giant of a man represents the best in humility and courage. In many ways he is a paradox – big, but gentle, intelligent yet acutely sensitive, and a natural leader always seeking the counsel of his peers.

These are simply hints at the complexity of the personality and but a glimpse of this uncommon man.

Skip and his remarkable wife Monica have two sons. Richard, a graduate of UNLV, is currently the food and beverage manager at St. Clair Country Club in Pittsburgh.

Michael, the younger sibling, recently graduated with a degree in early childhood education and will soon be teaching developmental skills to two to five-year olds. Physically challenged, Michael, like his father, has consistently expressed an eagerness to serve others and to make a difference.

Both sons are Eagle Scouts and are in the Order of the Arrow and both, like their parents, are humble and generous, astute and talented and eager to succeed in all that they do. As Skip describes nearly all of life's challenges, "It is what it is... and we will deal with whatever comes along."

As many in the industry are challenged with finding sufficient time with their family while in the service to their clubs, Skip, Monica and the boys have found ways to maximize the family experience whenever possible, while still giving back to the community, the industry and the care of one another.

SEE **COVER STORY** - PAGE 22



Working at multiple prestigious and well known clubs over his career, Skip has chaired many committees at the CMAA Badger Chapter before becoming chapter president in 2000. He also served as vice-chair of the Wisconsin Restaurant Association and a board member of the Easter Seals Association. Elected to the CMAA board, Skip has chaired several national Committees, and now assumes the role as the CMAA's President 2012.

Skip describes his goals and objectives over the next 12 months as building value for the members. Leading the list is a CMAA risk management division responsible for new educational programs and products proactively designed to minimize losses and maximizing value for CMAA members. Many of these programs are now available to members.

Another priority is CMAA University, a centralized, on-line platform providing professional development training for both management and staff direct from the member's desktop.

This includes webinars, a 10-part interactive "Manager in Development" program designed for entry and mid-level managers, and over 20 management training courses in 10 competency areas. All are available as part of CMAA membership. In addition, staff training either as a la carte or subscription based programming, is currently available to CMAA members.

According to Skip, a key priority is Club Benchmarking, an innovative tool allowing CMAA managers to review data collected on 300 metrics allowing "apples to apples" benchmark comparison to clubs uniquely similar to member's existing clubs.

Instantly accessible PowerPoint presentations will be available to members in a format that is compliant with the Uniform System of Financial Reporting for Clubs. As Skip describes the process, "The system allows clubs true comparisons, rather than simply trying to match data from disparate clubs, markets and other data points.

"This is a truly unique metric available to all members who agree to participate in the initial survey. The current plan by CMAA is to provide three annu-

SEE **COVER STORY** - PAGE 26

al reports including the Finance and Operations Report, the Compensation and Benefits Report, and the Policies and Procedures Report.”

Beginning at the 2013 San Diego Conference, it's Skip's/CMAA objective to begin offering “Tracks”, a three-level educational offering segregating sessions on the basis of the attendees level of experience. As a part of the “Tracks” program, CMAA is formulating plans to offer an executive management program in conjunction with the process, perhaps as a pre-conference program for the more seasoned private club executive.

Last but not least, as Skip points out, “One of the reasons we hear why people are not joining, or managers are not signing up assistants or department heads is the cost. The membership step program has been set up to help lower the initial cost of joining the association.

“It is the association's hope that this will encourage current members to involve department heads and assistants that are not members and get them engaged. The new dues schedule allows the first year at \$500, the second year at \$650 and the third at full dues,” Skip explained.

“This allows staff to get involved and stay involved once they see the services that CMAA offers. Finally, there is the alumnus category, designed as a bridge between the student chapter and the professional membership. It is offered to anyone that has been a member of a student chapter and now is in the work force. Dues are half for two years.”

A big year with big plans, to be sure...All of this and the PGA, Constellation Senior Players Tournament June 28th to July 1st at Skip's new club, Fox Chapel Golf Club in Pittsburgh.

Throughout his career, colleagues, employees, boards and friends have been drawn to Skip's easygoing good nature. Kevin MacDonald, personal coach for CMAA, PCMA and fellow mastermind group member with Skip for the 12 past years, describes his friendship:

“Skip Avery is the kind of person you would get if you could actually design a best friend. He is a master of taking care of others. He fixes things and he doesn't seem to have a limit to how many things he will take on at one time. He is aware of how his actions impact the lives of others and he is careful to be respectful. His humility, his willingness to serve and make small people feel big is something to experience. If I lost my wallet, I would want Skip to find it!”

In 1999, Skip along with nine other industry professionals, some who previously had limited exposure to one another, formed a mastermind group initially called the Power of 10, now referred to as the P-10 Group.

The purpose? To provide leadership to the industry and professional support to one another. Through a collective process of monthly calls and sometimes twice a year off-site meetings, the group has solidified, bonded and evolved.

One of Skip's greatest contributions to the group, as fellow P-10er Dick Kopplin points out, “is his ability not only to share his enormous laugh and the joys of friendship, but also his ability to open his heart and soul. His moral compass is unequalled and he always seems to know how to do the right thing when so many people today prefer to do the easy thing. His sense of humor is unparalleled and he uses it well. I am so privileged to have him as a close friend in my life.”

While Skip's self-described leadership skills are more humble than offered up by his peers, he continues as always, to be both eternally inquisitive and open to new ideas.

“He has consistently and continually demonstrated non-judgmental support and loyalty to his peers and to his industry. His integrity is beyond reproach and he may will be on the way to becoming the best CMAA president ever,” says Milwaukee Country Club general manager Chris Boettcher, and another P-10 protégé.

The greatest gifts that we share in this industry are friendship, camaraderie and leadership...gifts that we all eagerly share with one another. As a friend to this gentle giant for over the past nearly 30 years I have witnessed Skip's reaction to challenge and watched him repeatedly spit in the eye of adversity while outwardly exhibiting calm and grace, and all while compassionately embracing his family and supporting his community and friends.

In his book, “A Higher Standard of Leadership”, Indian author, Keshavian Nair tells us, “With courage you will dare to take risks, have the strength to be compassionate, and the wisdom to be humble. Courage is the foundation of integrity.”

May we all be judged with even half the accolades offered by Skip Avery's family, friends and peers. We are in good hands... **BR**

Rick Coyne, who often writes the BoardRoom cover story each year on the new CMAA president, is CEO of Club Mark, and a friend of Skip Avery.