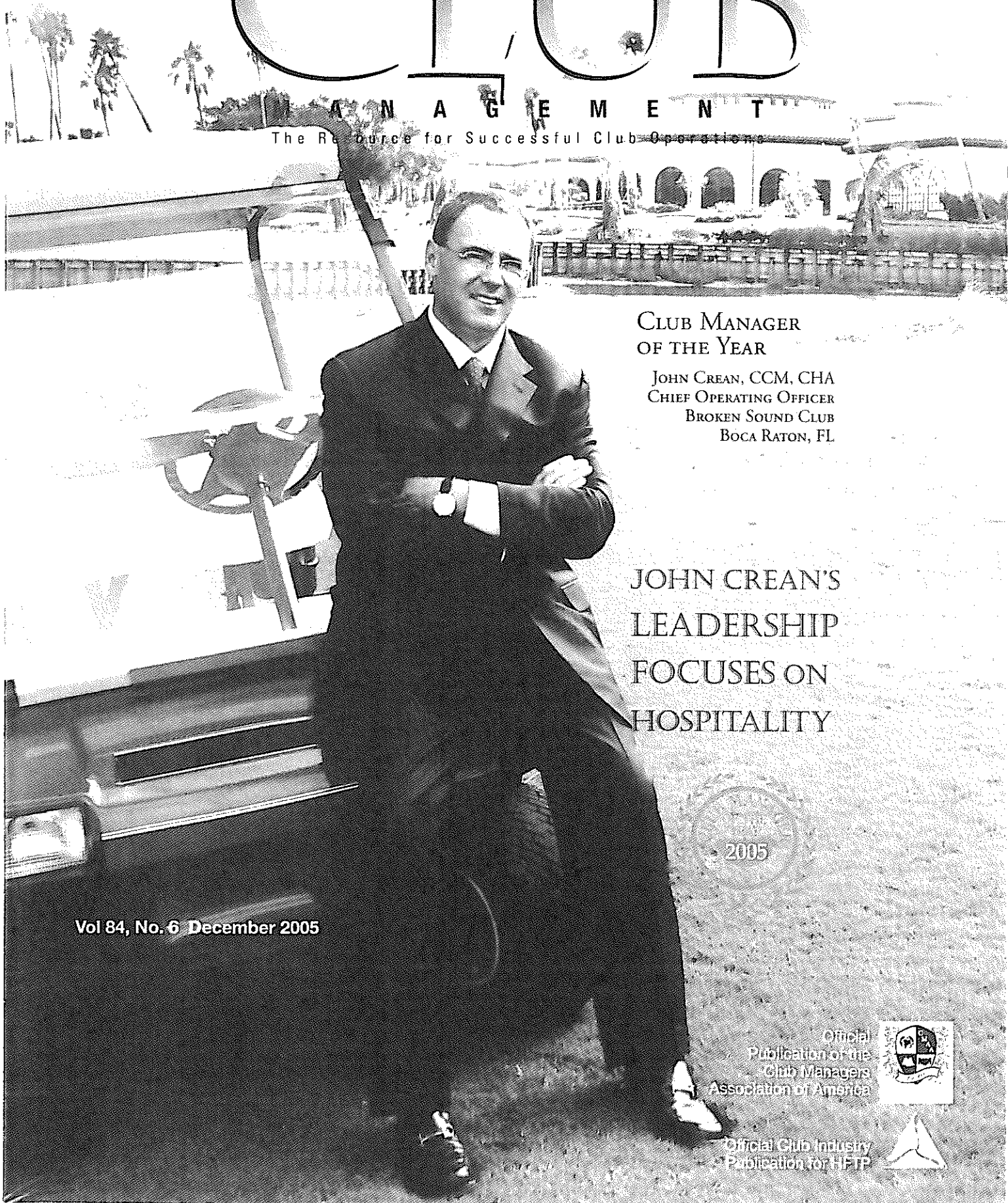


CLUB

MANAGEMENT

The Resource for Successful Club Operations



CLUB MANAGER OF THE YEAR

JOHN CREAN, CCM, CHA
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER
BROKEN SOUND CLUB
BOCA RATON, FL

JOHN CREAN'S
LEADERSHIP
FOCUSES ON
HOSPITALITY

2005

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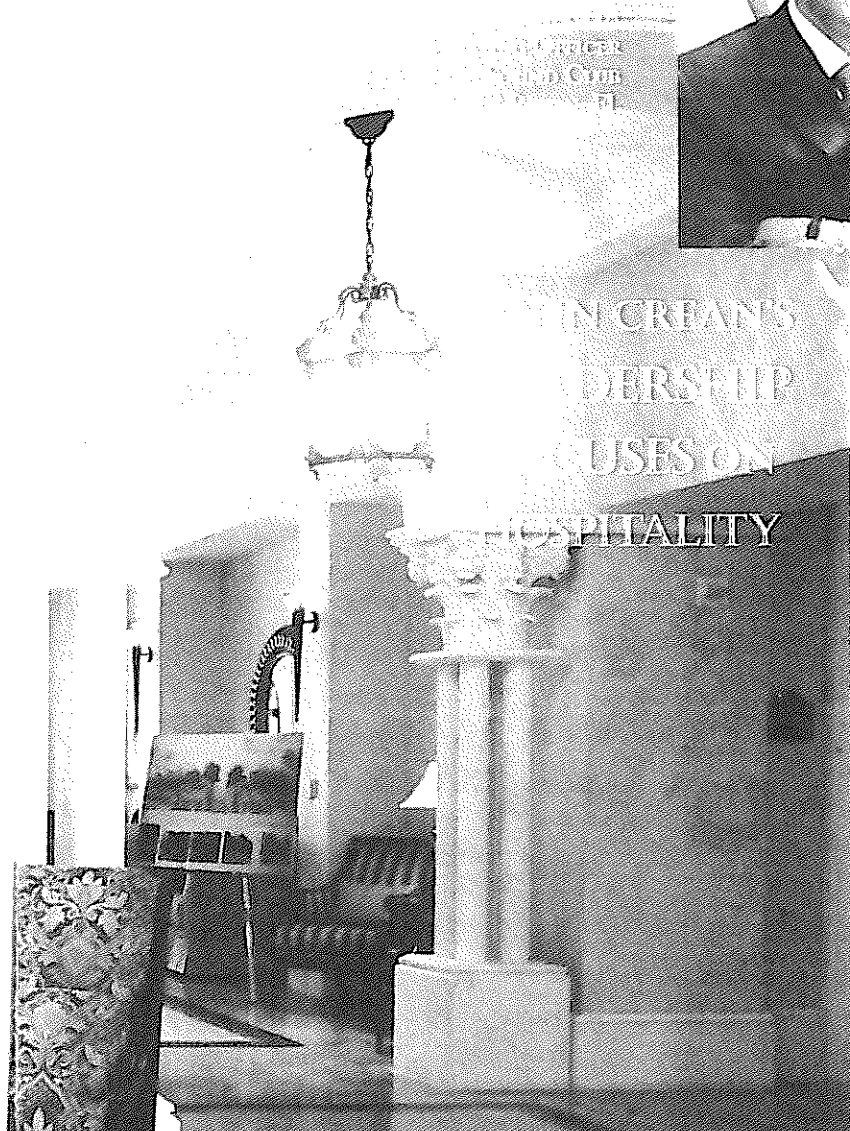
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2005 CLUB MANAGER



OF THE YEAR



BY TOM FINAN

Call it the luck of the Irish: When John Crean received a call from *Club Management*, letting him know that he had been selected as the 2005 *Club Management* Club Manager of the Year, he was in the middle of a conversation of with Frank Vain, president of McMahon Group. Vain had just informed Crean that he was the winner of one of McMahon's 2005 Excellence Awards for club managers.

But the old axiom rings especially true for Crean, the general manager of Broken Sound Club in Boca Raton, FL: The harder Crean works, the luckier he gets. And Crean is one very hard-working club manager.

John Crean was born in County



Photos courtesy of Broken Sound Club



Manager of the Year Crean believes "hospitality," not "service," is the key to a well-run club.

Roscommon, Ireland. He came to Broken Sound three years ago, having entered the club management field in 1989. In his tenure at the club, membership satisfaction has risen from 62 percent to 96 percent. He managed to achieve those numbers while leading the club through a \$34 million renovation process.

Crean is the 21st recipient of the *Club Management Club Manager of the Year* award. Previous winners are Larry L. Thompson, Missouri Athletic Club, St. Louis, MO; Jonathan F. McCabe, CCM, general manager, Union League Club of Chicago; A. Graham McDeson, MCM, Carmel Country Club, Charlotte, NC; Richard Bayliss, Jr, Oakland

Hills Country Club, Bloomfield Hills, MI; John R. Sullivan, Jr., Grosse Pointe Yacht Club, Grosse Pointe, MI; William A. Schulz, MCM, Houston Country Club, Houston, TX; Jay DiPietro, Boca West Country Club, Boca Raton, FL; Stan Orr, Union League Club of Philadelphia; Robert C. James, CCM, Westchester Country Club, Rye, NY; Richard Kolasa, CCM, Skyline Country Club, Tucson, AZ; Melvin D. Rex, CCM, Duquesne Club, Pittsburgh, PA; John D. Hudson, CCM, Big Canyon Country Club, Newport Beach, CA; Christopher A. Borders, CCM, Atlanta Athletic Club; Sally Burns Rambo, Lakewood Country Club, Dallas, TX; James H. Brewer, CCM, Los Angeles Country Club; Joseph Brem, CCM, Paradise Valley Country Club, Paradise Valley, AZ; E.M. "Mike" Frazer, CCM, St. Petersburg Yacht Club; Edward J. Drew, Quinnipack Club, New Haven, CT; Donald T. Hayes, CCM, Scioto Country Club, Columbus, OH; and Laurice T. Hall, MCM, Pinehurst Country Club, Denver, CO.

The candidates for Club Manager of the Year are nominated by their fellow club managers. An anonymous panel selects each year's recipients. The program is supported by industry vendor sponsors. This year's sponsors are Admiral Furniture; Architectural Design Group; Bollinger, Inc.; Brand Design Source; Buz Software; Chipman Adams; Club Car; clubessential, inc.; E-Z-Go Textron; Gasser Chair Co., Inc.; Harbor Linen; Homer Laughlin China Co.; Judd Brown Designs; Losberger U.S.; Preferred Club Programs; Private Club Access; RSM McGladrey; Steelite International; Triar Seafood; Veneman Collection; Victor Cornelius Menus; Yamaha; and Zurich.

"No 'Levels' of Hospitality"

A brief conversation with Crean reveals the core value that has guided him throughout his career. It's a word that's used frequently to describe the Irish: hospitality. "I sort of live by the word 'hospitality,'" Crean said, "and I try to drum it home to every worker. There's 'levels' of service, but there are no levels of hospitality.

"From dishwasher through social director I tell them that they need to treat the member the way they'd like to treat a friend. I try to surround myself with the best and the brightest — and make sure that they're surrounded with the best and the brightest.

"People can certainly forgive mis-

takes, but they can't forgive attitude. If you find the right people, you have to pay them, hold onto them, and make them happy."

Unlike many past Club Manager of the Year winners, Crean did not grow up in the hospitality business. "My father had a tile and mosaic business," Crean said. The family business was no little storefront: Founded by Crean's grandfather, the family business is one of the largest tile and mosaic producers in Europe. But Crean's interests lay in other areas. After completing hospitality school at Regional Technical College in Galway, he finished his education in the field in Switzerland.

Then the luck of the Irish came into play. In 1989, Crean hit the lottery — lit-

managers were hired and dismissed in fairly rapid succession. Then, the 26-year-old assistant manager was offered a crack at the job.

Robert Capazzi was president at Muttontown and saw the potential of the young assistant. "John was the assistant manager and we had to terminate the manager. The board felt John was not experienced enough, but I felt he had all the makings of being a fine manager. He had an unusual amount of energy and intelligence and a winning way with people," Capazzi said.

Slowing Down a Whirlwind

One trait of Crean's concerned Capazzi, however. Crean was trying to do so much at one time that Capazzi was worried that club officers and members

just saw him at the driving range, and another would say, 'I just saw him at the pool house' — and those are on opposite sides of the club.

"The guy is in perpetual motion. When we would have a meeting with our board of directors on the second floor of the club he would be running up the stairs." And Crean wasn't just fast on his feet: "We'd be talking and I'd say, 'John slow down. My ears don't hear as fast as your mouth talks,'" Goldstein recalled.

But the new manager wasn't all talk. "He had follow-through," Goldstein said, "which I think is very important." Crean was known at Muttontown for having thoroughly researched everything that came before the club's boards and committees. "He might not always give you the answer you wanted, but he always had a reason for the answer he gave," Goldstein said.

Dedication to Education

Newbie manager Crean was concerned about having street-cred with his experienced food and beverage staff at Muttontown; so, in typical John Crean fashion, he decided to do something about it. Attending school four nights a week — from midnight to 8 a.m. — Crean completed a culinary arts diploma at the New York Restaurant School in seven months.

"It was one of the best things I ever did. It solidified my position with the staff," Crean said. Education has continued to play a major role for Crean — both for himself and for his staff. He holds both the CCM and the CHA designations. He was scheduled to attend the CMAA BMI VI at St. Andrew's in Scotland before that plan was scuttled when Broken Sound was hit by Hurricane Wilma.

Crean has instituted a club-wide service program that has increased staff efficiency and service. Training programs include a course entitled "Understanding People," and another entitled "Positively Outrageous Service!"

He backs up his belief in hiring the "best and the brightest" and compensating them accordingly. Employee incentives instituted by Crean include education reimbursement, the addition of three paid holidays, use of the club facilities, and the award of a week's vacation for one exempt and one non-exempt employee to anywhere in the world.

An immigrant to the United States — as is his wife Rachel, a Dublin-born



In the shift from developer to member-owned, John Crean was charged with creating "Taj Mahal" facilities for Broken Sound.

erally. But this lottery was for a green card, which allowed him to go the United States and work at a club. He was hired to work as an assistant manager at the Lawrence Beach Club in Long Island, NY, by Bill Rugolsky who Crean considers his biggest mentor within the club industry.

Two years later he was hired as the assistant manager of Long Island's Muttontown Club. There he worked under the tutelage of Hans Junneman. Shortly into Crean's tenure at Muttontown, however, Junneman died. Two general

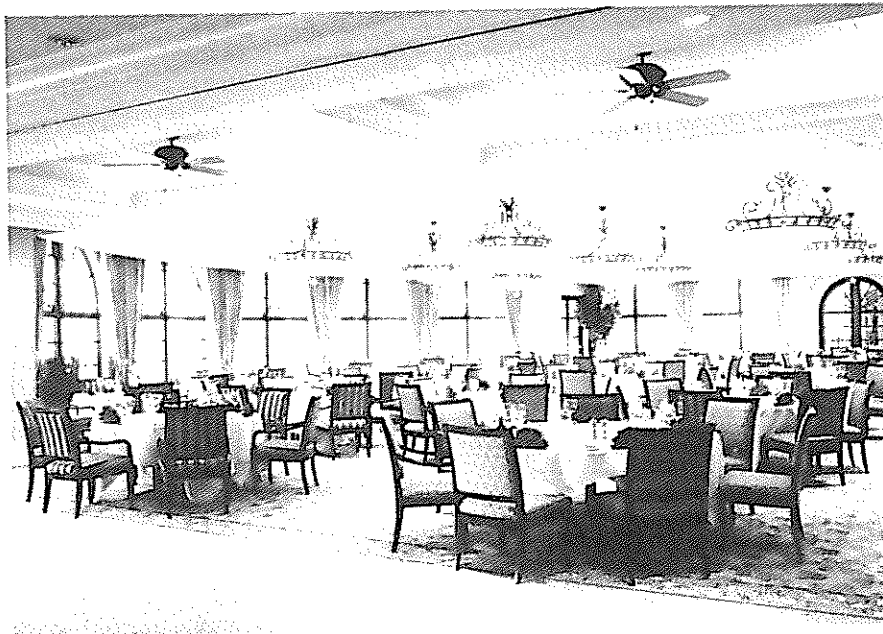
would perceive him as anxious and too green for the job. "I had to slow him down. Kind of get him to back off and slow up, so people would see him in a better light."

Crean managed to develop the statesmanlike stance that Capazzi was seeking without letting up his pace a lick. "If you asked the people at Muttontown, he never sat still," Stephen Goldstein, the Muttontown president who negotiated Crean's last contract there, said. "If you'd ask a group of people if they'd seen John, one would say, 'I

cytologist — Crean recognized the difficulties experienced by immigrant workers once the club season ends. He developed a program that negotiates the intricacies of finding off-season work at clubs in the Northeast for the club's international workers who have displayed an 'elite' work ethic.

Building the Taj Mahal

Broken Sound Club, a seasonal facility, has 1,418 members in all categories. There are two golf courses; a 64,000-square-foot clubhouse; a second 24,000-square-foot clubhouse; a 16,000-square-foot fitness facility that



Adjustments that Crean made in Broken Sound's kitchen and dining room operations have food and beverage business booming. Banquet sales for 2005 were 100 percent over projections.

includes a 4,000-square-foot fitness/cardio area, a spa, and an aquatics area; and 23 tennis courts.

Michael Mallaugh was the president of Broken Sound when Crean was hired.

"We took over this club from the developer," Mallaugh said. "The facilities were inadequate. We urgently needed to make improvements. Obviously what we wanted was a Taj Mahal, but built at the price of a shack.

"We knew that the name of the game (for contractors) was to say 'yes, yes, yes' to whatever was on the plans, and then make a bunch of money on the change orders. So we told the members that we were going to build the club that was on the design, in the timeframe that was there, and meet the budget.

"In the meantime we had a manager

who was perfectly adequate for everything that was going on, but he was getting whipsawed by member demands. We needed to make a change.

"We interviewed five people. The difference between John Crean and number two was enormous. Number two and the rest were very close together. On his way into the interview, John looked around the lobby for a couple of minutes and came in and asked, 'When a member comes into the lobby, how does he know what's going on at the club?'"

A number of the club's members

were from the North Shore of Long Island, so Crean was identified as a highly-qualified candidate. "But he was 36 years old, with no experience in Florida, and no experience with a residential club," Mallaugh said.

"This is the kind of guy we need to make a difference at Broken Sound," Mallaugh told the selection committee.

Crean immediately set about making good on the promise he had shown in the interviews. The previous manager had confined most of the club's food-service to buffets, citing a lack of kitchen space. When Crean proposed a fine dining program, this issue was raised. "He asked me, 'Mr. Mallaugh, have you ever eaten in a fine restaurant? The kitchens are a matchbox.'" Mallaugh recalled.

While construction was underway, the café at the club's tennis courts han-

dled 350-400 covers per day. Crean was so determined to make Broken Sound's food stand on its own that he eliminated the food and beverage minimum.

During the construction process, Crean took a problem with the kitchen design and converted it into an advantage, Mallaugh said. "The same people who designed the kitchen installed the equipment. The result was an under-designed, over-equipped kitchen," he said. The clubhouse expansions created space to move the equipment around to where it was needed.

A Blowout Debut

While Mallaugh knew that Broken Sound had the right person for the job in Crean, the grand opening of the new buildings completely blew away his expectations.

"He parlayed (the opening) into a phenomenal event," Mallaugh said. "We opened the club December 15th of 2004 — so our first big event was going to be the grand opening and the next event was New Year's Eve.

"We got to December and we found out that there were 1,400 people coming for the opening. Well, Crean had a plan," Mallaugh recalled.

Crean erected a tent large enough to handle all the diners with a stage and video screens at the center to give all the members and guests a good view of a Las Vegas-style review he had booked for the evening. The space around the stage was divided into seven different areas with slightly different color schemes for each area. A team of wait staff was assigned for each area. The result was clockwork execution: 1,450 dinners were served in 24 minutes flat.

Chief Operating Officer

And the hits just keep on coming. Food and beverage sales for 2004/2005 season were \$2.3 million — \$500,000 over projections. Banquet sales were 100 percent over projections. Other programs initiated by Crean include a professional caddy program, a marketing program to friends of club snowbirds living "up-north," hiring a social director to start activities such as new-member gatherings and singles programming, and establishing a fine dining program.

The directors of Broken Sound were so impressed with the quality of the operation that they installed Crean as "Chief Operating Officer" of the club, using the CMAA model.

"John brought his vision to Broken Sound Club of building a first class

management team, and then delivering an extremely high level of member service," Bill Boothe, director, technology and planning consulting services for RSM McGladrey, who has worked extensively with Crean, said. "That vision has become reality as John moves the club to the top level of management professionalism and member satisfaction."

"An environmentalist at heart," Crean has enrolled both golf courses at Broken Sound in the Audubon program. Other social issues in which Crean has been involved have included police and firefighter associations, the Association for the Advancement of the

Blind and Retarded, and the MS Society. Michael Mallagh said that Crean's community involvement has also been displayed in less visible ways, as when he helped Mallaugh with fundraising strategic planning for the Ruth Railles Jewish Family Service, a charity serving the elderly.

As this article went to press, Crean had brought the club back online from Hurricane Wilma. Immediately after the hurricane, he began restoring operations, bringing a refrigerated truck in to store food. The club prepared take-out meals for members on outdoor grills.

Club President Franklin Loh said that Crean's cool handling of the situation was indicative of what the members of Broken Sound have seen from him since his arrival at the club. "This is the third hurricane that John had to manage the club through. Last year we had two hurricanes.

"There are a lot of extremely good managers in the country. What sets John apart is his ability to react and respond. A lot of managers pay attention to detail. John Crean has a unique ability to react and respond. That's not something that you learn. It's something that you're born with." ❧

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