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*An Inspiration*

*To members, staff,  
friends and family*



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# Jay DiPietro

*An Inspiration...*  
*to members, staff, friends and family*

BY DAVE WHITE, EDITOR





Every so often a superstar comes along...no matter if it's baseball, football, business or the private club industry.

They're inspiring, magnetic personalities, with the marvelous skill, knowledge, vision and ability to see the 'big picture', and unquestionably the ability to 'get it done.'

That's Jay DiPietro, a 77-year-old charismatic dynamo and superstar in the private club industry, approaching his 30th year as the outstanding president and general manager of Boca West Country Club in Boca Raton, FL.

He has refined many of a club's best practices and guiding principles (**See sidebar: Jay's Mantra**). He's always a mentor, a helping friend of children in distress and a great booster and member of the Club Managers Association of American and the Club Foundation.

A 'people person' extraordinaire, Jay obliterates any Doubting Thomases. Tagging along on a walkabout through Boca West Country Club clearly illustrates why.

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He hugs many warmly, chats up others, wraps a consoling arm around a wanting soul, queries about a golf game, or explains to a questioning member what the club is doing to make 'their member experience' better, all while paying careful attention as his committed staff 'dotes' on Boca's members.

He's been doing this every day as Boca West's president and general manager. It's a big deal that the little 'things' don't get by him. He's a listener...and a doer. Just ask his many members who sing his praises, whether it's about the golf courses, the enticing food, the luxurious spa facilities, or just the fact Jay takes the time to have a 'little chat.'

"I'm the luckiest guy in the world," Jay related as he broke away for a 'quiet' few minutes. "I always remember where I came from."

For the uninitiated, Boca West, a *BoardRoom Distinguished Emerald Club of the World*, remains one of the nation's largest equity owned private clubs, spanning 1,400 lush acres of southern Florida tropical landscape featuring an array of magnificent residences...home to more than 3,380 families (about 6,000 residents).

"I've known Jay for almost 20 years, but it wasn't until visiting Boca West 17 years ago, I knew I had met someone really special," recalled John Fornaro, CEO of the Association of Private Clubs and Directors (APCD) and publisher of *BoardRoom magazine*.

"Walking through the club with him, he knew every member, and I mean 'he really knew every member.' Remember, Boca West is its own city, four golf courses and over 3,000 members and a staff of over 800 during the peak season.

"At lunch he fed me the most amazing beef brisket sandwich I'd ever eaten," Fornaro exclaimed. "Jay had flown to New York to find the best brisket recipe he could find, and he returned not only with the recipe, but a person with a 100 year-old recipe who would make fresh brisket sandwiches at Boca West. His members love it. Actually, everything he ever says to me ends up with how the Boca West 'members love it.'"

And to top it off, the silver-haired DiPietro has signed on for another term as general manager. Come Nov. 1, 2015, Jay will have spent 30 of the best years of his life at Boca West.

Then again, what else would he do? Retirement? Entirely out of the question!

So what's the driving force behind this inspiring man who spent his early days growing up in Boston on the wrong side of the tracks?

"With humble beginnings turning into successes, it allowed me to realize how fortunate and lucky I am. It allows me to help others succeed and achieve their goals, whether through my mentoring of staff or working to raise funds for charities that help kids. It always leaves me feeling fulfilled and energized. The club industry has allowed me to work with people focused on improving the lifestyles of both the members and the staff. That's really gratifying.

"I've made some mistakes but through persistence and determination, I've been able to overcome obstacles and be successful. Every night, I do a 'self evaluation' to see how I can improve the next day. I'm constantly challenging myself and that's easy to do because I love what I do," he related, while acknowledging a several smiling, happy members.

"Some memories really stand out for me," DiPietro opined. "Early in my career two clients – Frank Crippen and Tom Welstead from the Bal Harbour Yacht & Beach Clubs – helped me when I was out of work." (*The Bal*



*Harbour Yacht Club in southern Florida has since been demolished.)*

"They'd frequent one of the restaurants I managed and were instrumental in introducing me to the club industry. I had managed restaurants and hotels but didn't know anything about clubs.

"These two men initially took me on as a consultant to the Bal Harbour Yacht & Beach Clubs and I wound up being their general manager for seven and a half years.

"Club president Frank took me under his wing and taught me the difference between restaurants and clubs. He helped me overcome my lack of knowledge of the private club industry and instilled the 'member pleasing' principles that I follow to this day.

"Then Tom became president and we developed a wonderful working relationship and mutual respect for each other too.

"Their point of view – *member pleasing* – became my credo and remains so to this day. They also allowed me to get my sons on board to learn my trade. They really took an interest in my suc-



cess at the Bal Harbour Yacht & Beach Clubs, and all of my future positions,” Jay recalled.

Jim Singerling, who recently stepped down as chief executive officer of the Club Managers Association of America, is another who has taken an active interest in Jay DiPietro’s career. Their relationship goes back 50 years.

“No one has ever committed a greater portion of their life to the private club industry than Jay DiPietro,” Singerling opined. And that means commitment to his own private clubs, the CMAA and the Club Foundation, because Jay’s as widely known for his outstanding charity work.

“Jay’s contribution, as a governor and also as chairman of the Club Foundation, is one of fulfilling the vision and dreams of those who had the courage and wisdom to found the Club Foundation. Jay’s passion for helping his fellow man/woman/child exceeds my ability to put it into words.

“Jay convinced the *Florida Chapter of CMAA* to make a \$100,000 pledge to the Club Foundation. A huge commitment from a chapter and that pledge has been fulfilled.

“Jay forces everyone around him to think out-of-the-box. Some may have become jealous of Jay’s approach. They may not like how he articulates or demands performance, however, there is a long line of individuals that love to be a part of the successful ‘dream or vision’ once it crystalizes and becomes real. The gratification is the smile on the faces of the employees, the club members, the vendors, and mostly the children that reap the efforts of Jay and his colleagues.

“Jay takes his commitment of improving the lives of everyone around him – as well as many whom Jay will never meet – as seriously as he takes waking up every morning. Jay is a ‘driven’ man.”

Driven for sure. “When Boca West decided to initiate a charitable foundation to aid children-in-risk in Boca Raton and the southern Palm Beach area, there was no question who we had to turn to,” expressed Arthur Adler, Boca West member and chair of the Boca West Foundation.

“In the past four years, Jay as chair of the foundation’s advisory committee has helped raise and distribute \$2 million to make sure that over 3,500 children were fed, clothed, educated, had adequate health and dental care, slept in beds and not on the floor, and were not abused. And he worked to initiate summer camp opportunities for 400 kids this year alone.”

## Jay’s Mantra

### FIVE POINTS THAT MAKE A ‘GREAT’ GENERAL MANAGER

- 1) Respect the people for whom you work.
- 2) Respect the people that work for you.
- 3) Will understand that as GM, you were not hired to do what “you” want but rather to listen to the board and general membership to see what “members” want. The GM has been hired for their talent and ability to fulfill their visions.
- 4) The board of governors changes constantly so the GM must be flexible to deal with constant change of board members, changes of their vision, and different personalities and work styles.
- 5) The GM must work well with the department heads and committee chairs to constantly evaluate the existing operations; stay aware of the industry trends and constantly make improvements, and introduce new items and programming to keep the members excited. Remember, “You are only as good as your last meal, round of golf, etc.”

### SIX POINTS THAT MAKE A ‘GREAT’ BOARD OF DIRECTORS. A GREAT BOARD OF DIRECTORS WILL:

- 1) Serve the club in the best interests of “all” club members. Being on the board does not allow the board members to receive preferential treatment from the staff. Board members should exhibit professional behavior in all of their interactions with other members and staff.
- 2) Work together with each other and the GM to achieve set goals and when decisions are made as a board, all board members should be supportive and unified in their decisions when interacting with the general membership.
- 3) Work to understand the entire operation of the club – not just one facet. Understanding the “big picture” will allow the operation to run efficiently.
- 4) Communicate with the GM and board members on a regular basis. If a board member is approached with a question or complaint that is not under their realm of responsibility, that inquiry should be referred to the appropriate person who can solve that issue.
- 5) If a board member has knowledge of, or identified a problem under a fellow board member’s area of responsibility that problem should be addressed properly in private and resolved immediately. A public forum or board meeting is not the place to raise this concern. This allows for a cohesive unit and excellent problem solving benefiting the club as a whole.
- 6) The board members should not try to direct the staff. All direction and supervision should come through the general manager by following the club management’s chain of command. **BR**



## MENTOR, HE IS

The how and why people achieve their goals has given DiPietro ample opportunity to be a mentor, just as Frank Crippen and Tom Welstead instilled the 'member pleasing' principles in Jay's mind many years earlier.

"I take pleasure in mentoring my staff and revel in their successes. Seeing my team bond and grow over the years makes me very proud. The majority of my management team has been with me for over 20 years. Together we are constantly setting new goals and bringing the club to new heights, which keeps me 'fresh and enthusiastic' every day," Jay intoned.

One of his most helpful people on that team is Darlene Wright, who's been at Boca West since 1987.

"I walked in to Mr. D's office to interview for a "Girl Friday" position when I was 17 years old. In truth, he has been my education, both professionally and personally. He believed in me from the beginning. He taught me what I didn't know, kicked my butt when I did know but didn't apply it, praised me when I needed it and made me the success I am today," explained his executive assistant Darlene.

"I couldn't ask for a better mentor and that doesn't just apply to my career in the club industry. Jay (and Sharon) makes no bones about telling everyone I am his daughter or the daughter he never had, and he is the 'dad' I never had.

"Obviously I had a father but that has been an estranged relationship since my early 20s when I lost my mom," she explained. "Hence, Jay has been that father figure, my 'go-to' daddy and he has mentored me on all things necessary in a daddy/daughter relationship.

Jay's son, Michael has followed in his father's footsteps and today is general manager and chief operating officer at Aberdeen Golf & Country Club in Boynton Beach, FL. No question, Jay's been Michael's mentor along the way.

"My Dad has embraced all challenges presented to him with vigor, enthusiasm and a positive 'can do' attitude second to none," Michael injected. "He is a consummate professional, a steadfast supporter and a visionary with an unparalleled desire to continuously make Boca West Country Club the standard from which to be compared.

"He is a strong leader, a loving husband and a dedicated father with a genuine and heartfelt kindness for underprivileged children."

"In essence, Jay's commitment to excellence will eloquently transcend your dreams into reality and it's with great pride that I call Jay, my father, my professional mentor and most importantly my best friend," Michael added.

Others include Jay as their mentor. "He has mentored too many people to count, including me," related Michael McCarthy, CEO of Addison Reserve Country Club in Delray Beach, FL.

"My career would not be where it is today without Jay's involvement in my life. Many people who don't know Jay, have no idea who he really is – and I am here to tell you, from a guy that knows him extremely well, that you are not going to find anyone with a bigger heart than JD.

"I've had the good fortune to serve on our charity golf committee (*the Seminole Region Charity Golf Tournament, Inc.*) for 12 years with Jay. He has led the way in us raising

"How does one find the time to run one of the best clubs in America and still find time to serve so many others in need? How does one find time to always offer his expertise and assistance to colleagues when he is called on to do so? How does one be such a great husband, dad, and grandfather? The answer to all this is that there's only one Jay DiPietro!"

Michael McCarthy, CEO of Addison Reserve Country Club in Delray Beach, FL.

"Working for and with him has been a blessing. Not only am I fortunate enough to work for a man, whom I hold in the very highest regard, but I enjoy working for him. We have fun together...after 28 years in the same office every day, I guess fun is necessary!"

"Jay truly loves his job, he loves Boca West, he loves our members, he loves his management team and staff and I know he loves me...he tells me all the time. What better way could there be to work? I'll probably never know...I started my career with him and I'm convinced I'll end it with him in some way or another. I wouldn't want it any other way!"

over \$6 million for local children's charities – and that's just his involvement with us."

*The Seminole Region Charity Golf Tournament* is Jay's "baby", the one that raises so much money locally for the kids in need, celebrates its 25th year in 2015. Another mighty fine accomplishment!

"How does one find the time to run one of the best clubs in America and still find time to serve so many others in need? How does one find time to always offer his expertise and assistance to colleagues when he is called on to do so? How does one be such a great hus-

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mation is invaluable, and also will sign up clubs individually for deep-dive reporting. Membership marketing firms, search consultants and trainers for your staff are also available through CMAA's healthy list of vendor/partners.

So what state does that leave us in? Our industry is now lean and mean with good talent and good members. The state of your club is hopefully better too; hopefully, a club with more discipline and more accountability.

But what will be next? What is the next state of business in our near future? My prediction: Careful growth in other segments. Golf initiatives will grow and golf clubs will always be strong but country clubs, and also active beach/yacht and multi-use clubs, are becoming more important because of their diversification. They are also more nimble and ready to accept change.

The new "Zoga-Yoga-Boom-Ba-Whatever" that comes up as a new trend will be more adaptable in these diverse clubs. City clubs have the toughest times with families and members looking for more. The trend of growing metropolitan areas is likely the saving grace for city clubs in the next decade, because more and more people are moving "downtown" - a noticeable factor especially in secondary sized cities around the country.

The state of the industry can be pretty peachy for the leaders of clubs to reflect on and prepare for. Stay accountable; be respectful and good stewards of your business. Keep a close eye on the program, keep your members happy and let the leaders Lead ON! **BR**

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band, dad, and grandfather? The answer to all this is that there's only one Jay DiPietro!" McCarthy enthused.

Singerling claims his "greatest challenge was to get Jay to marry his sweetheart...his wonderful wife Sharon. He must have dated Sharon for a decade before popping the question. But Larry Bernhardt, a past chair of Boca West, and I made it our mission to assure that Jay did not let Sharon get away. And Jay has always realized that we can achieve nothing alone"...of course, referring to DiPietro's wife Sharon.

"Jay lives his passion and he quietly walks-the-walk with the intense purpose to help reach and aid as many children as possible. His outreach is without borders," related Sharon.

"We are products of our environment and we can either take those lessons and become a better person or repeat those lessons and become less than what we could be. Jay's childhood lessons of hardship created the foundation for his mission to reach and aid all children in distress, no matter the age or walks of life.

"As a young girl, I read a wonderful quote ... that became permanently etched in my heart. It describes my husband perfectly... 'A man never stood so tall as when he stoops to help a child.' In my eyes, my husband is a giant!"

Now as Jay pushes ahead with the Boca West's newest 'member experience' amenity (a \$50 million golf and activities center expansion that will open in 2016), he recalls another memorable experience of his own...the occasion of his 20th anniversary as Boca West's president and general manager.

"The board, chaired by Dorothy Bucksbaum honored me in numerous ways. ...an exquisite Patek Philippe watch, a special dinner and a video highlighting my 20-year history at Boca West.

"Then they surprised me by naming the club's newest restaurant, Mr. D's, after me. The walls display memorabilia highlighting my history at the club...what an honor!" And, by the way, a great place for a bite to eat!

But perhaps Fornaro and Singerling best sum up Jay's extraordinary contributions to the world around him.

"You can't teach someone to be like Jay DiPietro," Fornaro expounded.

"He has this unique service gene. He wants to make people happy, to have a great experience and he wants to make it better every time. No resting on laurels for Jay.

"Jay's been my mentor in the private club industry," the BoardRoom publisher added. "He's very much a visionary, he is passionate, not afraid to make a decision, has built one of the best managerial teams in the country and has great character, a true leader.

"I believe in Jay's club philosophy. 'It's about the member, stupid!'," knowing that's something we should already know.

"But that just doesn't have the same impact as when Jay, with his east coast accent, voices it. Nonetheless, we can all learn from Jay...'It's all about the member...!'"

Singerling added, "the 'key' is to be the conductor of the greatest symphony in the world and never seek being known as the greatest conductor in the world. The goal is to allow everyone to enjoy, admire and respect every musician in the symphony.

"It is never the instrument that makes the music. Rather it's the talented musician, who has assumed ownership of the goal...the vision. Jay DiPietro is the greatest conductor in the world...and my dear friend." **BR**