

# KemperSports Meeting the Challenge of Private Clubs

**THE PRIVATE CLUB SIDE OF THE GOLF INDUSTRY PRESENTS, IN ALMOST EQUAL MEASURES, UNIQUE CHALLENGES AND UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES.**

Earlier this year, KemperSports CEO Steve Skinner and his executive team acknowledged that reality with the creation of the Kemper Collection division of the company, dedicated to the growth of the company's private golf and country club portfolio.

KemperSports, based in the Chicago suburb of Northbrook, Ill., currently operates nearly 90 U.S. courses in 26 states, as well as two international properties.

Approximately 15 of those comprise the company's Kemper Collection of private clubs, with that division headed by

private club industry veteran Barrett Eisman. Skinner, the company's long-time president, ascended to the CEO position several years ago when KemperSports founder and CEO Steve Lesnik moved into semi-retirement as the company's chairman of the board, as his son Josh stepped into the role of president after guiding Bandon Dunes to a preeminent spot among U.S. golf destinations.

While customer service is a mantra at all of KemperSports' golf properties, Skinner is well aware that service is not just an amenity, but an absolute essential in the private club world. He is equally aware that the programs where that service is provided take place at many more places than the golf course at private clubs. Today's member profile is changing,



JIM DUNLAP  
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR  
BOARDROOM MAGAZINE

and club managers need to engage their members and offer programming that appeals to every family member.

"It all comes back to member happiness, where they're wanting to spend more time there," Skinner said. "You have to offer programming to all parts of the family, because the private club is changing so much now. You have to develop relationships with [members]."

Toward that end, KemperSports' clubs are constantly expanding the variety of their programming options, Skinner said, from cooking classes to youth programs in tennis and golf, as well as wine tastings and 9-hole golf leagues to accommodate busy schedules and create interaction with other club members.

On the food and beverage side, the increased member emphasis on value has led to a much more casual menu and am-

like KemperSports brings some advantages to the table, in terms of both expertise and resources.

"On the maintenance side and the F&B side in particular, our national buying power helps a lot," he said. "We're also always looking for ways to deliver service with fewer people, and one of the ways we do that is with an emphasis on the hiring process. We do a lot of staff cross-training to do multiple positions – department heads are out on the floor more."

Eisman, who joined KemperSports in mid-2011 and began putting together the framework for the Kemper Collection for its inception this year, said that the tough economic times in recent years have, to some degree, created a new breed of club board member and manager.

"When I'm talking to owners and management of clubs today, it's amazing how much more educated about the pri-

*"When I'm talking to owners and management of clubs today, it's amazing how much more educated about the private club business these people are today. You need to have a creative mindset today. These days, for instance, a club's food and beverage committee will understand the business better, in part because a lot of times they have F&B professionals on those committees now."*

*~ Barrett Eisman*

bience on most occasions, with burger nights, special theme nights and relaxed dress codes.

"On the F&B side, it's about delivering value today," Skinner said. "The old model of the country club being the most expensive place in town no longer works."

To make sure the company is delivering the quality of both service and programming needed, KemperSports has implemented what the company calls its True Service customer service training program, and a True Review program engaging staff members in continuous monitoring and review of club programs and policies to ensure that club members' expectations are being met, and to suggest programming improvements.

Revenue is one key to the club business, but Skinner said the expense side is equally critical, and one where a company

private club business these people are today," Eisman said. "You need to have a creative mindset today. These days, for instance, a club's food and beverage committee will understand the business better, in part because a lot of times they have F&B professionals on those committees now."

Eisman's observation is testimony to one of the few positive results of the down economy that has plagued the private club industry as well as the nation and the world in general, attesting to the accuracy of Darwin's survival of the fittest theorem.

KemperSports, like other strong private club boards and managers, is adapting to current challenges with new ideas and strategies, and will be better off for that when the economic tide turns. **BR**



BARRETT EISELMAN



STEVE SKINNER, CEO

BoardRoom magazine's 2012  
**Management Company of the Year** 2012  
Excellence in Achievement Awards