

THE BOARDROOM

CELEBRATING 24 YEARS OF EDUCATING THE PRIVATE CLUB INDUSTRY

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Distinguished Clubs
from **BOARDROOM**
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Distinguished President of the Year

Fritz Skeen
Sawgrass Country Club

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Sawgrass Country Club's Fritz Skeen Selected

Boardroom's Distinguished Club President for 2019

"What makes Fritz Skeen a unique president is his ability to communicate with our diverse membership and collectively blend those voices and ideas."

– Donna Fiedorowicz, Chair of Golf Committee, Sawgrass Country Club

And so goes the praise for Fritz Skeen, president of Sawgrass Country Club of Ponte Verde Beach, FL, a *Boardroom Distinguished Club* upon his selection as *BoardRoom's Distinguished Club President for 2019*.

BoardRoom magazine this year is recognizing 24 *Private Club Presidents and Board Chairs of the Year – 2019*, for practicing what they preach – leadership for the betterment of their clubs – board presidents or chairs who serve as the volunteer leaders of their club.

It's the 12th year *BoardRoom* magazine has recognized the industry's top private club presidents for their outstanding work. This year nominations and applications were received from different clubs throughout Canada and the United States.

"Our selection of the top 24 presidents and Fritz Skeen as our *Distinguished Club President* signifies another successful search through the nomination of leaders who have contributed so much to their private clubs and their member experience," expressed John Fornaro, *Boardroom* magazine's publisher and CEO.

"We honor board leaders, exemplary individuals, who go beyond the basic requirements of governance and work collaboratively with the club's management. The award underscores the role that a board president and his leadership play in driving a club's success and contributing to the club's long-term health.

"The non-profit private club industry is the most difficult industry of which to be a board member or manager. Board members, who are also the shareholders (owners) of the club, are also the customers. Often fraught with conflicts of interest, a private club can be very challenging to manage," Fornaro added.

"Through the process of collaborative governance, the general manager, the club's president and the board members are meant to work collaboratively. We recognize board presidents that don't delve into micromanaging.

"Micromanagement is not only frustrating for management, but also wastes board members' often limited time to do their actual job, which is directing ... setting policy, and not managing the organization or operations. That's management's job," Fornaro emphasized.

"This is a wonderful achievement for Fritz Skeen," acknowledged Gordon Welch, APCD, the spearhead behind the Boardroom Institute, the on-line training arm for private club board members.

"Congratulations. The *Association of Private Club Directors (APCD)* is thrilled to recognize this outstanding achievement and award," he added.

The impetus for *BoardRoom's Top President* recognition program comes from its sponsors, the *Association of Private Club Directors*, the parent organization of *Boardroom* magazine, and Kopplin Kuebler & Wallace, one of the country's leading private club industry consultants and executive search firms.

"Kopplin Kuebler & Wallace has been fortunate over the past number of years to partner with *BoardRoom* magazine in recognizing the dedicated individuals who are willing to serve their club as



*Distinguished
President*

PICTURED LEFT TO RIGHT: C.W. COOK, GM/COO AND FRITZ SKEEN, CLUB PRESIDENT

president," expressed Dick Kopplin, partner in KK&W with Kurt Kuebler and Tom Wallace.

"Our travels allow us to meet with dozens of club presidents every year and we're always impressed with their level of commitment to the betterment of their clubs. That's why we are so happy to assist *BoardRoom* in honoring these unpaid volunteers who give so much of their time to improving the governance and management at the clubs they love," intoned Kopplin.

"We know this year's nominees offered so much selection, but we are pleased to see the recognition of President Skeen as *BoardRoom's Distinguished Club President of the Year*. He embodies so many of the qualities we see in outstanding club presidents. He is someone who listens to his fellow board members and just as importantly to the club members.

"We salute these unpaid volunteers who are truly committed to enhancing the club experience for their fellow members. Along with *BoardRoom* magazine, we salute them and want them to know we appreciate their efforts," Kopplin added.

A CLUB HONOR

"While I personally appreciate this award, I think that it's really an honor for our club and the Sawgrass Country Club presidents and boards of today and yesterday," President Skeen expressed.

"At the time I joined Sawgrass Country Club, the board moved to the strong general manager/COO model. The succeeding presidents and boards made good critical decisions on adding a monthly operating capital and facility funding fees.

"This allowed the club to build a 6,000 square foot fitness center, renovate our 27-hole Ed Seay-designed golf course, keep our 13 tennis courts in great shape and do a \$3 million renovation of our beach club, with only short-term borrowing," Skeen added.

"Today with a new 65,000 square foot members' clubhouse being erected, we will have a moderate increase in that facility funding fee and have a fiscally conservative plan in place that funds the repayment of the clubhouse loan."

Sawgrass Country Club was founded in 1974 by Jimmy Stockton and developed into one of our nation's premier residential country clubs. Jimmy Stockton hired Ed Seay, before he became partners with Arnold Palmer, "to design a championship golf course to resemble Troon, if Troon had palms and ponds." Ed Seay succeeded, and Sawgrass Country Club was born.

Sawgrass Country Club hosted one of the PGA TOUR's premier events, The Players Championship, for five years from 1977 to 1981, after which the tour moved the championship to their newly developed and present home TPC Sawgrass.

Jack Nicklaus, Ray Floyd, and Lee Trevino were a few winners of The Players Championships held at Sawgrass Country Club.

Today, Sawgrass Country Club is a premiere member-owned private club in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, bordering the Atlantic Ocean and conveniently nestled approximately 30 minutes from Jacksonville or St. Augustine. Sawgrass with 1,475 members is at full capacity with a wait list.

Several changes highlight the achievement of President Skeen during his term as president. They include:

- Increased depth of the board orientation
- Successful onboarding of new GM/COO
- Continued increased emphasis and funding for ongoing facility maintenance
- Implemented an ongoing members satisfaction survey through ClubIQ, instead of a large survey on a biannual basis.

"Fritz Skeen has done a great job as President of Sawgrass Country Club for the past year and a half or so," said Kurt Kuebler of KK&W, who has watched the work of President Skeen.

"First, he oversaw the hiring of a new GM/COO at a critical time in the club's history because there had just been membership on a vote/approval for a new \$20 million golf clubhouse.

"It was critically important navigating those waters as the former GM/COO had been there for nine years and exacting communications were key to member support and approval. President Skeen did an outstanding job of reassuring members, gaining their support and keeping them informed while at the same time being actively involved in the search for a new GM/COO.

"Since then, the project is well underway, the new GM/COO has hit the ground running in a highly supportive governance model that Fritz has been able to steward – allowing the GM/COO to do exactly what they asked him to do upon arrival...run the operations, while leaving the policy, governance and strategic issues to the board," Kuebler explained.

"Fritz has encouraged C.W. Cook, that GM/COO, to be a highly active "thought partner" with the board and treats him with appropriate respect and is deferential to operations. At the same time, he provides GM Cook with outstanding guidance, input and support, *when asked* to do so. He hasn't pushed *his objectives* but has taken his fiduciary role as the 'steward' or chair of the organization to heart."

A major impetus for President Skeen has been the educational process for the club's board of directors. "The process begins with our Leadership Development Committee, which has replaced the club's nominating committee," explained the club's GM/COO C.W. Cook.

"This group of members does the interviewing and selection of candidates and develops the slate of board candidates. In addition, the LDC solicits members to apply for assignments to committees and then selects members for the various club committees. I consider the LDC the most important function in our governance," Cook added.

"The process is intended to develop members for potential board service via committee participation and to provide current committee members a method to expand their understanding and involvement. Implementation of the process results in a more open selection of committee members and encourages greater member participation in club governance.

"The goal is to provide a methodology where those volunteering for committee service can do so and those interested in board service can be given additional committee exposure, which strengthens our club's leadership in years to come and provides a solid human resources matrix for our overall club governance," GM Cook outlined.

"Once elected to the Sawgrass Board of Governors, the new board members go through a two-day orientation, with the GM, club president, other existing board members and various members of the management team.

"This includes a tour of all the facilities at the club, a review of club financials and an explanation of the monthly financial package, a complete review of our membership programs, types of memberships and the various membership metrics.

"The president covers how the board meetings operate and issues of club governance, with emphasis on our GM/COO model," Cook explained.

"Simply put, our model is that the board of governors deals with the gray and the GM/COO deals with the black and white. We also spend time on our mission

President's Background Contributes To Sawgrass Country Club's Experience

Fritz Skeen, BoardRoom magazine's Distinguished Club President for 2019, has put his years of experience as a member of a private club to great work.

After joining Sawgrass Country Club in 2004, Skeen jumped into the club governance process and served seven years on the club's board of governors' committees including legal and bylaws, leadership development and membership committee.

Fritz Skeen and his wife, Helen Morse, have been members of Evanston Golf Club, Skokie, IL, where he also served a term on the club's board of directors.

He's completing his fifth year on the Sawgrass board of governors.

Now retired from IBM, Fritz Skeen held a variety of sales and marketing management

and executive positions, related to Information Technology and Communications.

In the process of his career, Skeen was located in Lexington, Kentucky, Raleigh, NC, Los Angeles, CA, White Plains, NY and Chicago, IL. Some of his positions with IBM included, Branch Manager, Chicago, IL; Regional Manager, Los Angeles, CA; Group Director Telecommunications Product Marketing, NY and General Manager, Chicago, IL.

He received his BBA from the University of Kentucky in 1972 followed by his MBA, also at the University of Kentucky in 1973.

Fritz Skeen is tireless supporter for his alma mater, the University of Kentucky. He has held numerous leadership positions with the UK Alumni Association culminating with serving as the president of the Association in 2018-2019.

Skeen and two fellow UK alums also have restarted the Jacksonville UK Alumni Club, where he continues to serve on the board. **BR**



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and vision, our core values and our general strategic themes. This year we updated our strategic plan, which we do every three to five years, and the BOG spent several additional days in session on the strategic plan," President Skeen explained.

In updating the strategic plan, the primary effort has involved defining strategic statements across 10 functional club areas.

"The strategic statements were tied together through the focus of the member experience. Together they help define what the members will experience as "The Sawgrass Experience," said GM Cook.

"One of the keys to Fritz being a successful club president is that he takes the time to listen to its members and acts in a fair and measured way." – Bill Edge, Chair of Legal & Bylaws Committee

"Action plans then were developed and along with the functional area strategic experience statements analyzed to create six overarching strategies for Sawgrass Country Club. These six statements embody the strategic efforts and action plans across all the functional areas. As a final step metrics were defined that will help us monitor our progress towards achieving our strategic goals," Cook added.

Sawgrass Country Club also makes itself the beneficiary of outside resources, for both board and club members.

"We provide our board members with copies of BoardRoom magazine and The Private Club Advisor and find both to be helpful and educational. Additionally, we have been users of Club Benchmarking for a number of years and have developed a level of confidence in that information and what it provides to us. This is particularly helpful

when we are looking at our budget development process," President Skeen stressed.

How does President Skeen view this educational growth for board members?

"All our board members are vitally interested in seeing our club work well and fully support the GM/COO," the Distinguished Club President explained. "We view that we have made it to the point that through our orientation and ongoing meetings we continue to improve our education on how to properly function as a country club board."

What does all this mean for the club's GM/COO C.W. Cook?

"During our time together, we've dealt with many challenges (as all clubs do), but I'm no longer amazed at how President Skeen handles these challenges because I've simply become accustomed to his approach," expressed GM Cook.

"He ducks no situation, no matter how difficult it is. He responds to every email he receives in a transparent fashion. He follows up with some difficult phone calls to simply talk through things as a gentleman does. He invites civil discourse and always remains civil. People know that they can trust him because he always has the club's best interests at heart.

"Probably one of the most admirable traits is that he's not afraid to reverse a course of action if he feels that we've got it wrong. We all learn from our daily interactions with Fritz Skeen!" Cook emphasized.

"All of this is exactly how we see the best run clubs function. It just doesn't happen that way very often and never without a true 'steward' in the president's role," concluded KK&W's Kuebler.

Yes, Fritz Skeen has demonstrated that time and again at Sawgrass and as a result both member satisfaction and staff satisfaction are exceptionally high at the club. And what can be better than that! **BR**

2019 Top Private Club Presidents & Board Chairs of the Year

BoardRoom magazine for the 12th year, is recognizing 24 presidents as *Private Club Presidents and Board Chairs of the Year – 2019* for practicing what they preach – leadership for the betterment of their clubs. Private club board presidents play a huge role in the professional operations of their club as volunteers working diligently with their board of directors and general managers, striving for well informed, but not emotional decisions.

BoardRoom magazine's 23 most outstanding private club presidents and board chairs for 2019, plus the selection of *Fritz Skeen, president of Sawgrass Country Club, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL as BoardRoom Distinguished President for 2019*, exemplifies the focus on the leadership responsibilities, the accountability and the management of the board, while providing a healthy respect for the club's macromanagement.

"This kind of recognition for volunteers who give so much to the club has been long overdue, and since the first awards were presented 12 years ago, there's been a steady growth in the nominations by club general managers and others in the private club industry," exclaimed *BoardRoom* publisher John Fornaro.

These board presidents, chosen from clubs in Canada and the United States and other parts of the world, understand the importance of working, effectively and efficiently, with their volunteer boards and the dedication that's required from everyone with whom they work.

They practice what they preach – outstanding leadership to maintain best practices and an extraordinary *member experience* for their members clubs.

Systems alone do not insure a good board. Key elements include commitment, competence, diversity, collective decision making, openness, transparency, effective communication with management and the membership, fiscal responsibility, development and establishment of the club's mission, vision and policy direction, especially through establishment of a strategic plan.

Successful board presidents draw upon the expertise of other board members, the club's institutional memory and stewardship of the club's resources. As well, board presidents provide new board members and future presidents with information they need to perform effectively as board members.

Congratulations to BoardRoom's outstanding private club board presidents and chairs for 2019.

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|-----|---|
| Fritz Skeen | Sawgrass Country Club | USA |  |
| John Alle (advisory chair) | The Riviera Country Club | USA |  |
| Alexis Bove | Waynesborough Country Club | USA |  |
| Patrick Britt | Norwood Hills Country Club | USA |  |
| Tim Condon | Diablo Country Club | USA |  |
| Charles J. Davidson | The Union League of Philadelphia | USA |  |
| Andy Fromm | San Francisco Yacht Club | USA |  |
| Shawn Ghatan (advisory chair) | The Riviera Country Club | USA |  |
| Barry Gordon | Addison Reserve Country Club | USA |  |
| Albon Head | The Fort Worth Club | USA |  |
| Randolph Heartfield | Thunderbird Country Club | USA |  |
| Bob Hill | Mountaintop Golf & Lake Club | USA |  |
| Howard Liebman | Boca West Country Club | USA |  |
| Jeff Mapstone | The Country Club of Rochester | USA |  |
| John Morris | Dedham Country and Polo Club | USA |  |
| Jeff Pero | Lake Merced Golf Club | USA |  |
| Dana Roberts | Jonathan Club | USA |  |
| Gordon Roberts | River Crest Country Club | USA |  |
| Dr. Lloyd Rothouse | Colleton River Club | USA |  |
| Adrian Sakashita | Hacienda Golf Club | USA |  |
| Jim Steinmeyer | The Academy of Magical Arts | USA |  |
| Richard Straughn | Mountain Lake | USA |  |
| Steve Sunshine | Shady Canyon Golf Club | USA |  |
| Scott Urdine | Desert Mountain Golf Club | USA |  |

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