

There's More to the Story than Gastronomical Delights!



DAVE WHITE
EDITOR, BOARDROOM

GASTRONOMICAL EXPERIENCES IN HISTORICAL FRIENDLY SURROUNDINGS! PROGRESSIVE DINNERS ARE JUST SO APPEALING FOR ALL WE FOOD LOVERS!

This captures the essence of the CMAA's annual World Conference progressive dinner. Not only is the food exceptional, as we nibble on local delicacies, but it's also an evening of progressive networking with like-minded people.

New Orleans in February afforded a true gesture of Louisiana hospitality, but there's much more to this story than the exceptional hospitality and the great food.

This progressive dinner focused on three New Orleans private clubs – the New Orleans Country Club, the Metairie Country Club and the Southern Yacht Club –that literally 'have been through the mill.' These clubs stand as tributes to hard working members who have brought their clubs back from the brink...Katrina on August 29, 2005.

Initially founded in the 1920s as the Metairie Golf Club, like many others have over the years, became mired in financial difficulties, but as the Phoenix rises from the ashes, so did this club, with its reincarnation in 1945 as the Metairie Country Club.

The club expanded over the years and in November 2004, following a major course renovation, re-opened to its original 1920s design. Less than a year later, that all changed as Katrina rolled in and left eight feet of standing water for three weeks, resulting in extensive damage.

A rebuild has happened, with millions spent on the golf course and \$20 million on a clubhouse. Now the club has returned to its grand state with a membership approaching 1,000.

Similarly, Katrina hit the Southern Yacht Club, founded on July 21, 1849, and although modestly damaged by wind and floodwaters, a massive fire ultimately destroyed the clubhouse in the hours following the storm.

Sadly many precious and historic trophies and artifacts, including four Sir Thomas Lipton trophies, became memories in the conflagration. Undaunted the club's leadership erected temporary facilities in early 2006 and after another two years of construction, the club's fourth clubhouse opened in August 2009...still the crown jewel of the New Orleans lakefront.

Katrina also wreaked havoc on The New Orleans Country Club, the oldest and largest country club in Louisiana, dumping about four feet of water on the property. Perhaps the most fortunate of the three, the NOCC reopened its doors to members on Dec. 1, 2005, three months after the devastating storm.

The New Orleans CC remains well known as the course where famed golfer Bobby Jones fired his famous 'shoe' shot in 1919, and it's equally celebrated for its Big Oak, a massive 300-year old oak, stoically standing guard near the clubhouse and the 18th green.

The Big Oak's a survivor...losing only a few limbs to Katrina. But that's just part of the story. Back on Halloween evening 1921, club president Crawford Ellis got an alarming call that his club was on fire.

He raced to the club in his dinner jacket to see the building ablaze with flames creeping toward the Big Oak.

He yelled at firemen to aim their fire hoses toward the tree, but meeting some resistance along the way.

"The hell with the clubhouse, let's save the tree," he yelled. "We can build another clubhouse, but we can't take the time to grow another 300-year old tree."

Needless to say firemen saved the tree that seemingly lives a charmed life.

The New Orleans Country Club, like the Metairie Country Club, and the Southern Yacht Club, remain sentinels of the state's private club industry, even as they've been through tough times.

Indeed, these clubs are indicative of a proud Louisiana spirit that remains alive and well today. Kudos for a wonderful evening of fun, great company and conversation and extraordinary food. **BR**

*Got a comment? Drop us a note:
dave@boardroommagazine.com*



DAVE, LEFT AND JOHN FORNARO, SOAK IN THE AMBIENCE SURROUNDING THE NEW ORLEANS COUNTRY CLUB, AND THE CLUB'S 300 YEAR-OLD BIG OAK, NEAR THE 18TH HOLE.
PHOTO BY BRUCE MATHEWS