



## Looking Ahead

These thoughts are apt to be a lot like what we'll hear later from Tom Crean; it's better to look forward because looking back over the year nearing its end is not too pleasant. And, like Crean's likely assessment that he has strength on which to build, the University Club also has many attributes that promise a great future.

The economy has had a very serious impact on the club this year. Room rentals, the club's largest source of revenue, have been MUCH less than expected; off by more than a third. Departments that customarily use the club for their special events have curtailed use to conform with newly imposed budget constraints. Business use of the club has also been cut in response to the bad economy. In addition, members have not been using the club as much for their personal celebrations. The current signs of an improving economy give hope that these circumstances are only temporary.

Membership renewal has similarly suffered. Renewals dropped in 2008-09 from 2007-08 by about 9% and are down another 7% so far this year. Follow up with non-renewing members has seemed to point primarily to a broad based desire to limit spending, not dissatisfaction with the club's programs and activities. While departments and businesses may resume use of the club as economic circumstances improve, recruiting a lost member to again be a member will probably be about as difficult as attracting new folks to join. Over the years, little has been done to attract new members or entice dropped members to rejoin. Several initiatives were taken this year through direct mail to community prospects and e-mail invitations to faculty. Happy-nings were intended to be an informal occasion when prospects could become acquainted with the club and its members and be enticed to join. The results of this effort are yet to be measured but attendance at the Happy-nings events was disappointing as are early returns from the recruitment efforts. Hopefully, initiatives of this year may bear fruit in the future.

The programs offered this year have been stellar with exciting personalities and topics. Comments by those who have attended indicate great satisfaction with the activities, events, and programs as well as the improved quality of luncheon food. But, like membership, attendance has been lower than expected and the resultant financial support has fallen short of needs.

While rentals, membership, and programs have not met expectations, there is much to cheer:

- Barb Aspy has been doing a great job, serving members with style and dedication while saving probably 15% of the cost of operations.
- Sponsors have brought new value to members and the sponsor program has the potential for greater future benefit. Special thanks are due this year's sponsors—Meadowood (2 events), Home Instead, and American Family Insurance.
- Poor attendance at the Happy-nings helped show that faculty and staff have a very limited desire for an on-campus bar operation and the IMU's interest in converting the President's Room for use as a bar has waned.
- The new cooperative travel program with Meadowood is being well received with members increasingly availing themselves of a wide variety of theatre, outing, and trip opportunities.

- Volunteer support of club activities through work on committees has remained strong and the leadership of the club and its constituent societies has been vigorous.

These are challenging times with a currently optimistic outlook. The club has been coping with challenges but its basic core of enthusiasm and initiative provide a sound basis for optimism. As Editor Bob Zaltsberg at the Herald-Times said on March 1, the future is “optimism wrapped in opportunities, shrouded by uncertainty.” Every member benefits from a strong club and the experiences of this year demonstrate that there is the strength to weather this storm.

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PLEASE contact me by email at [rrkovener@aol.com](mailto:rrkovener@aol.com) or by phone at 337-8920 if you have concerns, suggestions or ideas for the board to discuss or consider. Member input is important.