

From left, Farmington Country Club's training program participants Erik Laaksonen, Hannah Robinson Kass, Tatum Howe and Patrick Sears

PREPARING FUTURE GMs

Farmington Country Club's Assistant Manager Training Program

By Bridget Gorman Wendling

Photos courtesy of Farmington Country Club

Farmington Country Club in Charlottesville, Va., is renowned for its hospitality, beautifully landscaped grounds and its historic architecture from Thomas Jefferson. Set in a vibrant college community and catering to 2,500 members, including 1,450 nonresident members, Farmington Country Club has an unmistakable energy that is buoyed by its staff.



FARMINGTON COUNTRY CLUB

PAYING IT FORWARD

The club's successful operation is overseen by Joe Krenn, CCM, CCE, ECM, chief operating officer and general manager, who leads a staff of 450 employees, 340 of which are year-round. Krenn entered the club industry as an assistant club manager at Atlanta Athletic Club (AAC) and went through an Assistant Manager Training Program. After completing the training program at AAC, he facilitated that same training for new hires and, subsequently, carried it over to other clubs as well. The positive experiences he has had as both the trainee and then as the facilitator and mentor have helped shape his career and inform his leadership philosophy. He has been paying it forward ever since.

"I had the good fortune of being accepted into an assistant manager training program when I was starting out in the club industry. I gained so much more than just an education from that program and believe it's imperative that I give back to the club industry and to future club managers," Krenn explained.

A HYBRID OF TRAINING EXPERIENCE

When Krenn arrived at Farmington in 2012, Human Resource Manager Allyn Gutasukas was already facilitating a management trainee program that participants completed in one year. It was modeled after similar corporate hospitality management trainee programs. The current Assistant Manager Program, now in its fifth year, is a culmination of both their experiences with training programs, and draws upon lessons learned specifically in the private club industry.

With two program graduates having completed their training and new assistant managers beginning the program each year, it has evolved into a unique, comprehensive and rewarding experience that underscores their dedication to the club industry and their investment in young talent.

Krenn has developed relationships with student chapters and hospitality professors at several hospitality programs, and frequently accepts speaking engagements and attends job fairs. Over time, both Krenn's dedication to mentorship and Farmington's Assistant Manager Program have developed reputations for providing an immersive and integrative approach to preparing serious-minded hospitality graduates for a successful career in club management. The three-year program offers a competitive salary, progressive management responsibilities and ongoing training for professional development.

Thus far, two assistant managers have completed the program. The first graduate, Rebecca Wyskiel, is now the food and beverage services manager at Farmington. Krenn couldn't be more pleased with the decision: "From the time Rebecca

entered the program, we had the great fortune to watch her grow personally and professionally as a leader. Not only has she gained the respect of her fellow employees, she has built strong relationships with many of our members. The magnitude of experiences and their impact on member satisfaction during Rebecca's program participation made her the obvious choice to be our next food and beverage service manager."

Each of the two graduates was introduced to Farmington during the club's unique week-long externship program, which provides valuable, hands-on learning and relevant professional development for a group of hospitality students. The externship program enables students to tour several local clubs and interact and network with experienced club managers, including recent hospitality management graduates who are participating in the club's Assistant Manager Program. Participants stay on-site in the club's guest rooms and are able to interview for summer internships and the assistant manager program positions. Students receive academic credit from their schools for participating in this externship program.

EXPOSURE AND IMMERSION

The assistant manager's path for the training program is mapped out before they begin; trainees spend nine to 12 months in a particular area of the club with exposure to every aspect of that department's operations. The typical trainee rotational placement begins in food and beverage/banquet services, followed by operations, including front desk, reservations and housekeeping. During their second summer, the assistant manager will assume responsibility for the seasonal outlets. During this time, the trainee is fully accountable for all aspects of the operations. In the third year, the assistant manager focuses on the club's a la carte outlets, and the final component is a capstone course where trainees spend additional time in three areas of interest or in areas in which they desire more experience.

Farmington provides assistant managers with a salary and benefits package, one-on-one mentoring from experienced club managers, participation in the club's Performance Management Program, and opportunity for individual development. The structured, professional development program that combines department-specific activities and projects with an individualized curriculum of training and education, is designed to



COO/General Manager Joe Krenn with graduates of the Farmington Country Club Assistant Manager Training Program. Left: Rebecca Wyskiel. Right: Hannah Robinson-Kass.

prepare participants for successful careers in club management.

In addition to the workload, there is self-guided coursework; trainees take the initiative on their own to spend time in the required areas and must get the department manager to sign off on their work. Experiences in other club departments include organizing and executing club events that involve multiple departments; learning about the club's HVAC, water and security systems by spending time with the facilities management staff; working in the golf locker room cleaning golf shoes and changing spikes; planning and executing youth programs and participating in daily summer camp operations; and learning pool operations such as lifeguard scheduling, administration of pool chemical tests, and pool cleaning procedures.

The program includes presentations, case studies, book reports, participation in management meetings and interaction with committees and the board. This guided but independent aspect of the training is crucial for accountability and encourages initiative and leadership. At the conclusion of the capstone course, the assistant manager gives a presentation to the board of directors outlining what they've learned over the course of their time at Farmington. Each graduate receives a certificate, an engraved pen and has a graduation dinner to celebrate their achievement and exchange feedback.

Wyskiel is grateful for the experiences she had in the program and the foundation it has given her for a career in club management. Wyskiel said, "Making the decision to be a part of the program was the best choice I made to begin my career in club management. It has given me a solid foundation and a full overview of the industry. With each rotation, I was able to build upon the previous experiences, strengthen my management style, establish relationships with members and staff, and work on projects that challenged me and prepared me for my future roles."

"It has been exciting to watch the program develop over my time at Farmington," said Wyskiel. "I look forward to seeing it continue to grow and being able to mentor the assistant managers joining the team." ♦

