

** A Message From the CEO **

Howard Is Gone; His Spirit's Alive

by John Hawkins
President and CEO, The Club

I first met Howard Pompel more than 10 years ago when I was working at an insurance brokerage in Canoga Park. At the time we were in dire need of qualified insurance agents who didn't recoil at the thought of making cold calls to prospective clients. We also needed agents who were optimistic and positive, and had can-do attitudes. I think I interviewed more than one hundred agents, and very few were meeting our criteria. And then I walked Howard with a beaming smile, the slight scent of a freshly smoked cigar, a firm handshake and his powerfully confident voice. I thought to myself, "Now this guy is a *real* insurance agent."

And sure enough, the first words out of his mouth were, "John, let me ring up your phone bill!" which was music to my ears, since everyone else feared the phone instead of embracing it. Well, needless to say, I hired him on the spot. In fact, eight years ago when I left that company to work for the Club, I stole him away, much to the chagrin of that company's president.

My son, Noah, first met Howard when Noah was just a year old. Noah may not remember that meeting, but I sure do. Howard got down to his level and talked to him like a friend. Over the next 10 years, Noah made countless trips to my office, and each time he spent time talking to Howard, with Howard talking to Noah just like old buddies would talk (and believe me, Howard *and* Noah could really talk!). Noah was greatly affected by Howard's passing, as they had a special bond.

Throughout our lives, we remember those special people who impacted us. I'm sure Howard will be one of those people in Noah's life.



John Hawkins and Howard Pompel sharing a good time at ClubFest 2003.

Howard was also there when my second son, Isaiah, was born. And Howard was Isaiah's buddy, just like he was Noah's. In contrast to Noah, Isaiah was more of a snacker than a talker, and he had a fond appreciation for the never-empty barrel of pretzels Howard kept on his desk.

And then there was my daughter, Hannah, or as Howard would affectionately call her, "Princess." Hannah and Howard got along very well, not only because Howard was like a big teddy bear but also because of Howard's extensive Beanie Babies collection. And the pretzels, of course.

Howard was the kind of employee you search for yet rarely find. He was an icon at the office, setting an example for everyone to follow. He knew how to treat Club Members, and we all learned from him.

It's still hard to believe Howard is gone. I keep hearing his voice bellow, "Hey, boss" every now and then as I'm walking from office to office; but I look and no one is there. And it makes me sad.

We miss you Howard. Thank you for giving the Club the gift of your presence.

—JOHN

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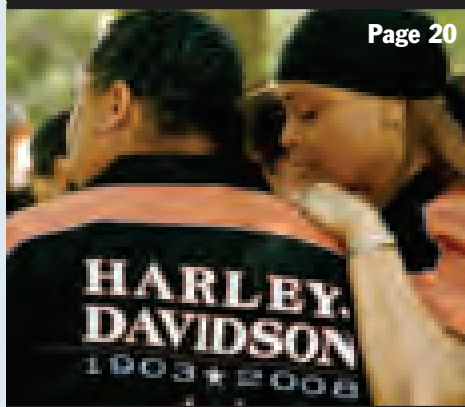
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The newspaper of the
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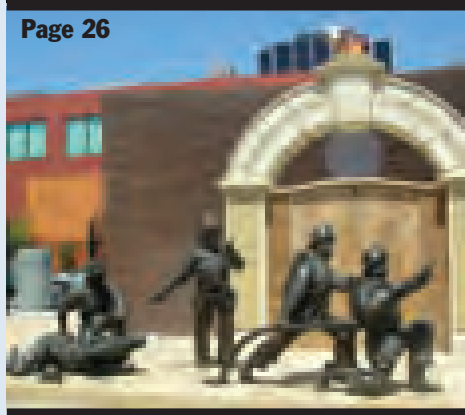
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