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# Alive!



Serving over 20,000  
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City Employees Club of Los Angeles

Vol. 10 ■ No. 12 • Dec. 2011

Robert Larios, the Club's Director of Operations, Sports Dude, Discount King and Chef Larios takes to the court between games of the Club Sports Program at Rec and Parks' Expo Center.



Robert Larios,  
Sports Dude,  
oversees a growing and  
passionate part of the  
City Employees Club.

- SEE PAGE 6

# CLUB SPORTS

Alive! photo by Sammy Lam and Tom Hawkins



City Employees Club of Los Angeles  
120 West 2nd Street  
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## Happy Holidays From the Club!

For Holiday Happenings around the City,  
see page 12

# CLUB

# SPORTS

The Alive! Feature

It started with an email to the Club.

In April 2009, Carlos Callejo, Storekeeper, General Services, 15 years of City service, was looking for a sponsor for his City Employees softball team, the Guzzlers. The previous sponsor, another city association, had dropped its sponsorship program.

So he wrote to the Club. "I decided to contact the Club and see if they would sponsor our team," Carlos said at the time. "To my surprise, they were very eager and excited about sponsoring not just a team but a whole softball league."

It started a flood and changed the Club by adding a major new benefit. From that one email until today, the Club Sports program has grown in participants, in the number of sports offered, and in its importance to the overall Club service. Back in 2002, the Club concept became a new vision for the LACEA, the Los Angeles City Employees Association. And the Sports program took the Club to a whole new level of Member participation and enjoyment. The Club Sports program has become a cornerstone in the daily life of the Club.



Club staff and athletes celebrate the birth of the Club Sports Program, June 2009.

Today, more than 300 Club Members take part in the Sports program, with more opportunities and sports on the drawing board for the future. As of now, the Club offers three major sports – softball, basketball, and running, with others under serious consideration. The Club is also looking at adding another site for games in the Valley.

"The great thing is that, besides playing ball, you can establish a family-like atmosphere with your co-workers that makes going to work more enjoyable because of those connections you have outside of the job," Carlos said. "It helps with morale and cohesiveness with your fellow workers."

At the center of the Club Sports League is its operations manager – Robert Larios. By day, he's the Club's Director of Operations. By night, he also runs the Club Sports program as the Sports Dude (and participates as a runner in the Club Running program). And he produces great recipes (and has for more than nine years) as Chef Larios. On top of that, he's the Discount King, creating great bargains and benefits for Club Members.

Any Club Member in good standing can participate in the Club Sports program. Go to page 20 for more information.

But for now, read more about the program and its leader, the Sports Dude.



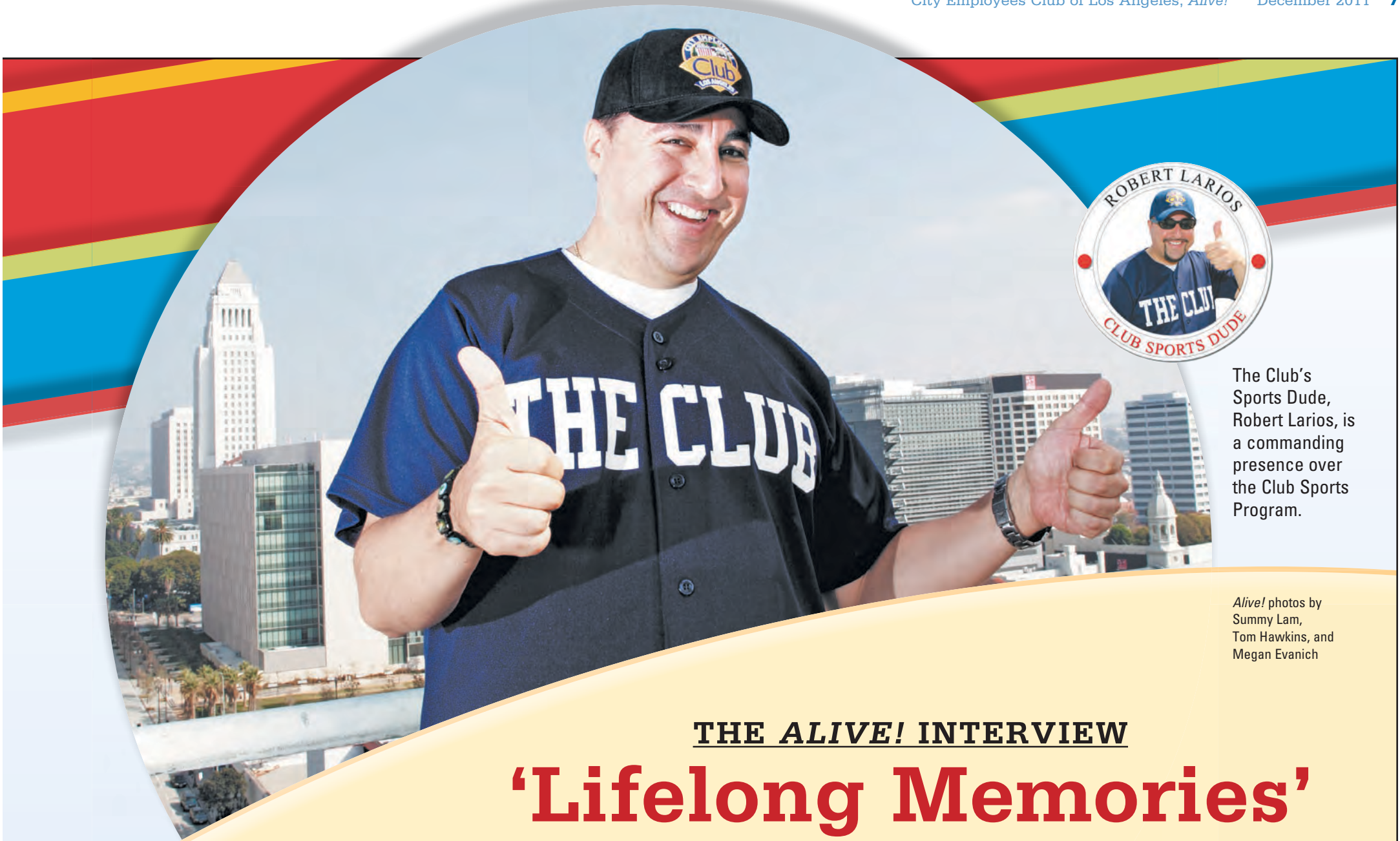
The Alive! cover that announced the beginning of the Club Sports Program (left) and the announcement of the Club Basketball League.



Softball



Running



The Club's Sports Dude, Robert Larios, is a commanding presence over the Club Sports Program.

*Alive!* photos by Summy Lam, Tom Hawkins, and Megan Evanich

## THE ALIVE! INTERVIEW

# 'Lifelong Memories'

On Nov. 7, *Alive!* editor John Burnes sat down with Robert Larios, the Club's Sports Dude (and Director of Operations) to talk about the great success of the Club Sports Program. The interview took place at the Club Store during Sign-Up Monday, when the Sports Dude is available to take registrations. —Ed.

***Alive!* Okay, Sports Dude — in your own words, tell me about how the Club Sports Program got started.**

ROBERT LARIOS: Sure. The Club was founded back in 2002. And even then, in those days, we had thoughts of providing a sports program. We just didn't know how to do it — the best way to go about it, or when was a good time to do it.

In a lot of ways, it sort of just presented itself to us back in 2009. The All City Employees Benefit Services Association had for many years done a superior job of providing a sports program for City employees. You know, dating back probably 20 – 30 years in the history. But in 2009 it seemed that they decided to go in a different direction and no longer provide those programs for City employees. So several managers of softball teams made up of City employees came to us and pleaded if we could sponsor their league. It took John Hawkins, Club CEO and President and I only about ten seconds to make that decision. We went ahead and said, "Sure, we'd absolutely love to do it. And that was the beginning of the sports program. We started with softball."

**The request came at the end of April 2009, and the program was set up in June.**

ROBERT: Right. Three years later, we now have several programs along with softball. We just finished our third softball season. Basketball, we're also on the third season. Teams are playing now. And we even opened up a running group for City employees to participate in officially sanctioned races around Southern California.

**The Club's Running Group just completed the YMCA Stair Climb event downtown. Have there been other running events, too?**

ROBERT: Absolutely. We actually sponsored five running events for Club Members this year. The first one was the "Spirit of LA" 5K run in Elysian Park, right above Dodger Stadium. We had probably about 12 runners there who were Club Members there.



Robert Larios (left) and John Burnes, *Alive!* editor.

And then later we had Club Members in the "YMCA Stair Climb" event, which took place at the West Coast's tallest building. Even I, Sports Dude, participated in that event. It took me about 24 minutes or so. "Ticket Gal" from the Club Store also participated, and she did very well. I think she finished in around 22 minutes. The fastest time was about 15 minutes from Genevieve Fernandez at the DWP. She almost got the bronze medal with that time.

**Wow!**

ROBERT: We just finished the Long Beach Half-Marathon. And then just recently we did the Rock-and-Roll Half-Marathon. That was the most popular of all the running events this year in terms of participation. We probably had about 35 to 40 Club Members participate in that one.

**That's tremendous!**

ROBERT: Yes. So the next event will be in December, the Santa to the Sea Half-Marathon in Oxnard. Participants can get prizes if you dress up as Santa Claus for that race.

### Growth

**We're probably getting ahead of ourselves a bit. How has the Club Sports program grown since you started?**

ROBERT: It's grown in a variety of ways. When we started, it was just softball. We probably had about eight teams and a combined total of about 100 City employees participating. But now, combined with softball, basketball, and the running group, we're somewhere around 300 Club Members participating in some way or fashion in the sports program.

**In just two years, you've grown that much. That's very impressive.**

ROBERT: Yes, it is! And because of the way we promote the program, we have probably gained about 150 or so new Club Members. We really like that. We appreciate that. The more members we get, the larger this

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## Basketball

# CLUB SPORTS

The *Alive!* Feature

## THE ALIVE! INTERVIEW

— continued

— continued from page 7

program can be in terms of the quality of sporting events. We can fund more money into those programs.

### The Importance of Sports

**Why is the Club Sports Program important to the mission of the Club? How does it work into the mission of the Club?**

ROBERT: The mission of the Club is "Celebrating the Lives of City Employees." The sports program is central to that whole idea. That idea is key to everything we do with the Sports Program — the softball games, the basketball games, the runs that we sponsor — what we're really creating are lifelong memories for City employees. While they're getting a little fitness and recreation, and hanging out with their colleagues maybe once or twice a week; it's really about creating this positive energy, these positive memories that they can take with them for decades, through their careers really, with the City. That's the Club's way, of celebrating their lives by providing these services and benefits. In a lot of ways, that's why we pay for their registration fees and for the fees for the officials. We even sponsor the jerseys for the variety of events. We do that because it's about making sure members get a bigger value to this, to create that memory for them.

### The Future

**Where do you think it's going from here? Do you have an idea about how you see it developing from here?**

ROBERT: Without question we are at the infancy stage with the Sports Program. We certainly have established some great programs with softball and basketball. And this is our first year with the running group. But there is room for a variety of other sports. The development of those programs really depends on the interest level of our Club Members. So if Club Members would like to participate in a volleyball league, we'd be happy to put that together. If it's a bowling league, we'd be happy to put that together as well. It's just a matter of getting enough Club Members to participate in that program to get it going.

**It sounds like you want to take it step by step. You keep growing it and make sure that it's done up to Club standards every step of the way.**

ROBERT: Right on! We're looking to make sure that we have enough participation by Club Members. And when we achieve that, we will make sure that the program is run the Club way. We want to make sure that it's run with a variety of things. That the employees have the proper gear, with nice, Club-branded jerseys. We want to be clear that it's a Club Sports league. That way we are able to place photos in *Alive!*. We archive the newspaper in the City archives, so that way, 20 or 30 years from now, or even longer, City employees in the future can actually take a look at a snapshot of how City employees were in 2011.

**The Club members who are participating in this, they seem really passionate about it.**

ROBERT: One story comes to mind. We have a DWP employee and his wife who lived up in Northern California, and they worked up there for DWP. They moved down here to the LA area, and the City was very foreign to them. They needed to meet new friends, and things like that. It was a challenge for them. I received a phone call from this DWP employee's wife. She wanted to play in one of the softball teams. So I made some calls to the managers. I told her that she could play. And I put her on one of the teams. She was so excited and happy to be able to play. She wanted to personally thank me, and she did. When I attended that game, she came up to me and shook my hand and said, "This is the best thing that's happened to me and my husband. We really love playing. The fellow employees here of the City and DWP have been super nice." She was happy about that. But more importantly, she said that she was happy that I helped her and her husband make friends here. Making friends is what it's all about.

**So what's upcoming?**

ROBERT: We're going to be putting together next year's schedule of running events, where we sponsor these races for Club members. So look in the January issue of the *Alive!* for that schedule.

And I would love to create a bowling league as well as a volleyball league for City employees. I know there's been a lot of talk about that.

And thirdly, a soccer league. I do get quite a bit of feedback from City employees asking about putting together a soccer league. So again, ultimately, it's just a matter of getting the interest level and getting enough people to want to play, and commit to playing. Once that's achieved, you know, then everything is pretty easy after that. We can get these teams scheduled, and confirm the locations, and we're ready to go.

Members will continue to see the Club Sports program evolve and change as time goes on. It will continue to expand. Just this morning I had a City employee come in, asking me about opening up a separate league for employees who live in the San Fernando Valley or farther north. It would be more convenient for them to be able to participate if they don't have to travel so far. There's a possibility for next year, we could have two leagues, one here in the Downtown district, and one in the Valley.

### The Sports Dude, in Balance

**Do people recognize you? Do they walk up to you and say, "Hey, it's Sports Dude!"**

ROBERT: All the time. Even here at the Club Store. That's why on Mondays I hang out at the Club Store. I have walk-ins all day long inquiring about certain sports, or wanting to register, or get on a mailing list. It happens when I'm out around City Hall, or when I attend most of the sports games. I'll attend as many games as I can. Obviously the players know who I am, but the people in the stands also call me the Sports Dude.

**People know you for Chef Larios, too, which I believe was in the very first issue of *Alive!***

ROBERT: The cooking column has evolved just like the newspaper has evolved.

I'll tell you an interesting story. The evolution of *Alive!* is synonymous with the evolution of the cooking column. So over the years, a cult following of cooking column readers developed. It increases year to year. I want to say we probably have around 200 to 300 where it's the first thing they read in the paper. I was down at City Hall. I didn't look like the Chef at all. I wasn't wearing my Chef gear or anything like that. I was actually in a business suit and going to a meeting. As I was crossing the street, I hear from the other side of the street, a City employee yell out, "Hey! Chef Larios! It's the Chef!" I looked over and I waved, and they ran across the street. I think they jaywalked. And they came over to me and they wanted to shake my hand and they treated me like I was a celebrity. My interaction with that City employee was very simple. I wanted to make sure that they knew that I appreciated them taking the effort to come and say "hello." I wanted to find out who they were, and what department they were from, and make sure that they felt that they were appreciated, and I thanked them for that.

**You have the cooking column on one end, and you take care of yourself on the sports and exercise side, too. You're enjoying life, and then you're working out as part of the Club Sports Program, so that your life stays in balance.**

ROBERT: Yeah, it's a delicate line that you walk, obviously. I make an effort to use ingredients that are low in saturated fats, and I try to keep the portions sort of just regular, not excessive.



The Sports Dude (right) thanks a Rec and Parks employee for helping to manage the game operations at the Expo Center.

For me, the Club Sports program has been a life-changing few years. I've always had a weight problem, so I decided to do something about that. For me, it was running. I've been participating in 10Ks and half-marathons. I've lost more than 50 pounds. And I'm trying to lose another 20 or so.

**That's fantastic.**

ROBERT: I can feel the dedication, the discipline that it takes to achieve goals. Whether it's winning titles or championships, or just being able to finish a half-marathon at your own pace. It's difficult to do. It takes a mindset to be able to do it. And the mind is an incredible thing. I truly respect anyone who participates in any sort of sport, may it be baseball or basketball, softball, soccer. It takes quite a bit of discipline to participate in those sports. And if you're looking to achieve some sort of goal, whether it's losing weight like me, or meeting some new friends, or for the sheer joy of competition, the Club Sports program is great.

**And the other persona, the Discount King?**

ROBERT: The Discount King was created earlier this year as our way to promote the Club's discount program. We have great discounts! Check the secret discount page on the Club's website.

**You wear a lot of hats.**

ROBERT: Yes. It's all about Club services, about serving the Club Members and celebrating their lives.

### A Friendship Thing

**What do you think is your greatest achievement with the Club Sports League so far? What are you most proud of?**

ROBERT: There are so many things, that you really can't quantify it. It's more about the interactions, the new friendships that have been established with City employees over the last three years. I've gotten to know people who I've never met before, more so than when I was Member Services Counselor, when I went out and made so many presentations. But this is a different world of employees that are interested in recreation and in fitness. It is such a joy to interact with these City employees.

Ultimately it's the friendships created between City employees on the same teams, and also on rival teams. I don't think they would ever have had that connection if it weren't for the sports programs. For me, that's been the biggest achievement — creating these new connections between City employees.

**We do that a lot here at the Club. It really does bring people together from different departments to think of the bigger picture, which is really working in the City of LA. Club Sports seems to do that really well.**

ROBERT: I agree. We started off with the sports program back in 2009, thinking that we're just going to go ahead and put together a season for these City employees, a softball season, and let them to play. We have never done anything like it before. So to us, we were just the new kids on the block. It's not about creating a season for them to play sports and on these fields. It's about creating these memories that are going to last.

**Thanks for talking to me today!**

ROBERT: You're welcome!

## The 3 faces of Robert Larios

In addition to his serious duties as the Club's Director of Operations, Robert Larios plays three roles: the Sports Dude (for the Club Sports Program), Chef Larios (for an *Alive!* column), and the Discount King (for the promotion of various Club benefits). All three are fun, but they're really about serving Club Members in excellent ways.





**Club Members Say...**

“The Club’s Sports Program has been a great opportunity to meet and interact with other City Employees. I have many new friends from other departments because of it. The Sports Dude is awesome! He is very dedicated and kind-hearted, and we all appreciate his hard work and effort. He makes the program great and rewarding!”

—**Lisa Pallares**,  
Traffic Officer II,  
Transportation.  
Participant in softball  
and running.

“The Club Sports Program creates a good time to get together with co-workers outside of work... without the seriousness. I hate waiting nine or 10 months for the next softball season!”

— **Manny Ortiz**,  
Traffic Officer, Hollywood  
Bike Detail, Transportation.  
Participant in softball,  
basketball and running.

“I’m grateful for the opportunity to exercise and to meet employees from other departments. We get a chance to build relationships and get to know them. Sports Dude, Robert Larios does a really great job!”

— **Ron Haywood**,  
Traffic Officer II,  
Hollywood Bike Detail,  
Transportation. Participant in  
softball and basketball.

**‘Making friends is what Club Sports are all about.’**  
— Robert Larios, the Sports Dude

