

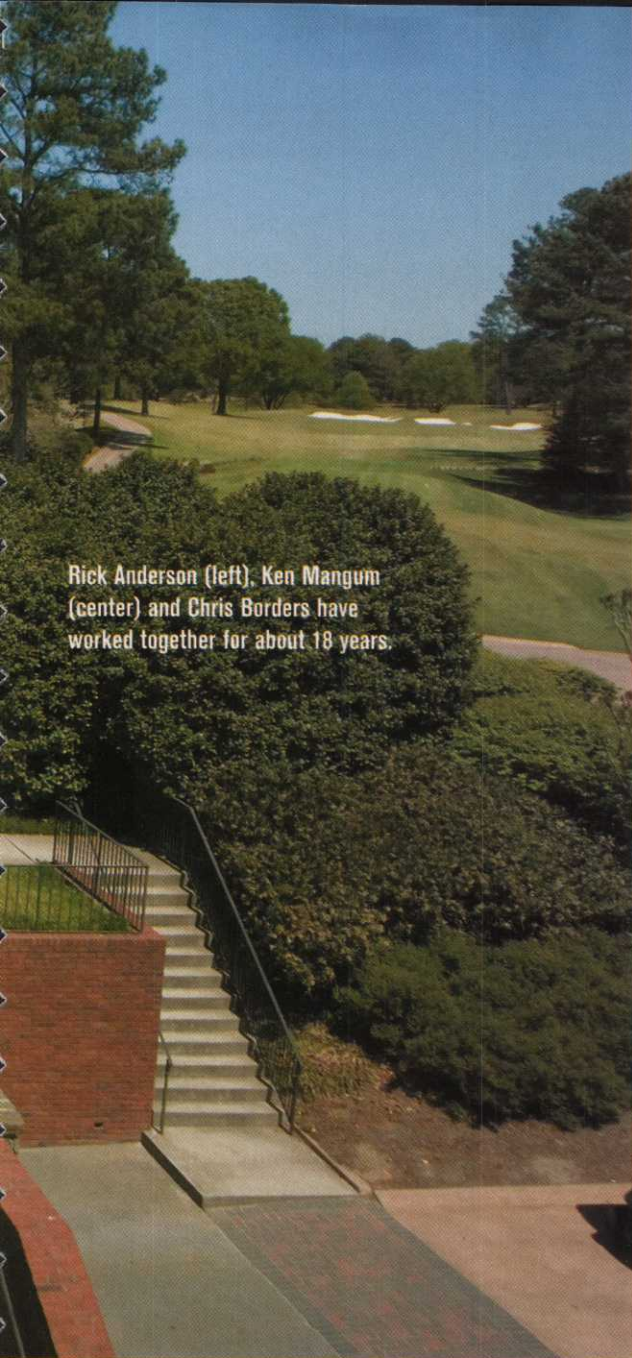


United They Stand

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR IN CHIEF



What they've got going at the Atlanta Athletic Club is something to talk about



Rick Anderson (left), Ken Mangum (center) and Chris Borders have worked together for about 18 years.

The good Lord blessed Ken Mangum with a gleaming grin, which he flashes often. Mangum's job as director of golf courses and grounds at the Atlanta Athletic Club is a central source for his smirking. It has given him many reasons to smile for the 19 years he has been at the club.

And Mangum is not the only one at the Atlanta Athletic Club, the renowned facility located in Duluth, Ga., who's beaming like a kid on his 16th birthday. So are Mangum's co-workers, from the club's director of golf to its general manager, both who have worked there for about as long as Mangum.

There's something remarkable happening at the Atlanta Athletic Club. The people who work there, the ones who make the club's motor whirr, couldn't like their jobs more than if they were playing on the PGA Tour — make that *winning* on the PGA Tour. Many of them have been together since the late 1980s.

Better yet, the nine people who comprise the club's management staff actually appreciate each other's jobs. They are interested in what their respective jobs entail. And they support each other — their unwritten rule is that they will never, ever throw one another under the bus.

What's more, they're friends. They take road trips together, and they play practical jokes on one another. They lean on each other and laugh together.

Yes, there are many reasons for them to smile.

"It's pretty amazing," Mangum says.

But don't think for a nanosecond that the Atlanta Athletic Club is the golf industry's version of Never Never Land. It's not magic that makes this all happen. It's work — hard work. It also takes patience and humility.

Mangum and the others, including General Manager Chris Borders and Director of Golf Rick Anderson, have been able to get along like devoted brothers because they focus on getting along like devoted brothers. They realize the Atlanta Athletic Club is not about them individually; it's about them as a team. Every morning before they enter, they check their egos at the club's doors.

"We've always had the ability to step back and say, 'OK, it doesn't matter about my department and my people, let's do what's best for the club,'" Mangum says. "We realized a long time ago that if the club is successful, we will all be successful."

The Atlanta Athletic Club is as bustling as the Atlanta airport, one of the nation's busiest. The club has about 2,000 member families, so there are 8,000 people coming and going from the club at different times. The club features two 18-hole courses, a nine-hole par-3 course, a practice facility and indoor/outdoor teaching facilities. There is also an athletic center, tennis courts, an Olympic-size pool and four restaurants.

Two men who contributed greatly to the club's modern success are Rene Cote and Gaylord Coan, who in 1988 outlined a plan to transform the Atlanta Athletic Club into one of the best in the nation by hiring top-shelf people to help run it. There was a catch. Cote, the club's president, and Coan, the club's green chairman, wanted people who were interested in working at the club for up to 25 years. They knew it was a grand plan, but they sought to make it work. "We set out to put a management team in place that could work to-

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The management team at the Atlanta Athletic Club realizes the club's success depends on their success as a group. (Back row from left) Rick Anderson, Chris Borders, Brian Marcus and Ken Mangum (Front row from left) Chris Clark, Jimmy Cole, Vincent Longo and Tony Kelley. Darin Armour is not pictured.



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gether toward a common goal," Cote says.

Cote and Coan wanted managers who would do their individual jobs, but who would also act as a team in the overall operational scheme. When Mangum interviewed at the club, he was impressed when Cote told him about the plan. "It got my attention," says Mangum, who was 35 at the time and was looking for stability in his career.

Mangum was also impressed when Cote made it clear that the club's board of directors would empower the staff to run the club with the board's assistance. Cote's philosophy was to hire good people and let them do their jobs. He knew this philosophy would resonate with his management team. And Cote believed that a happy management team would filter down and shape happy employees throughout the club.

Mangum signed on. So did Borders, who has been in his current position for about 18 years. Borders, who had previously worked at the club for 11 years before leaving for four years, has 29 years in at the club. Anderson joined the club in 1989 with the idea of a long-term commitment.

The three men joined Brian Marcus, the club's tennis pro, who was also hired in 1988, and Jimmy Cole, facilities manager of project management, who has been at the club since 1982 and assumed his current title in 1989. Vincent Longo, director of information, technology and security, was hired in 1990.

Borders is in charge of the management team, which also includes Chief Financial Officer Tony Kelley, who is in his eighth year at the club, and Club Manager Chris Clark, who is in his fifth year. The youngest member of the staff, Athletic Director Darin Armour, is in his fourth year. The veterans still call Armour "the rookie."

Cote credits Borders with keeping the core of the team together for nearly 20 years. He says Borders is an excellent motivator to the managers. "They do a terrific job of communicating to each other and to the board," Cote says. "They've been here a long time, and the members are proud of that."

There is turnover at the club, but many times it's a matter of employees leaving for better-paying jobs, which is fine with Mangum, who wants his staff to move on and up in their careers.

Borders is adding his own chapter to the Cote and Coan plan. The title is "Solidarity." Borders wants his staff to work together like a fundamentally sound baseball team. Perhaps Borders' motivation for that is the memories he has when he worked at the club during his first 11 years.

"Under [that] regime, the golf pro hated the general manager, the general manager

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Team Builders

Ken Mangum, director of golf courses and grounds at Atlanta Athletic Club, offers these suggestions for successful operations:

- Help each other.
- Cover each others' backs.
- Never say, "That is not our job."
- Give other department employees a hand if they're down; don't step on them.
- Keep each other from being blind-sided.
- Play golf and/or spend time together.
- Organize and define structure for success.

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Vincent Longo (left) is the club's director of information, technology and security. He also sports a fine sense of humor, even when it comes to group photos.



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hated the superintendent, and the superintendent hated everybody," Borders says. "There was a clash of personalities."

That's not the case on the current managerial staff. But that's not by accident; it's by Borders getting each manager and their staffs to coalesce so they can understand each other better professionally and personally.

Case in point: Jason Harris, the golf course superintendent at the club who reports to Mangum, enjoys the four-on-four basketball games between the maintenance shop and the pro shop. Afterward, the staffs go out to eat. The time spent together enables the two departments to find out more about each other, especially what they do at work.

When Harris realized the "clubhouse people work as many hours as we do," he had a newfound respect for them. He is also glad he has gotten to know them on a personal level.

"I'm able to put a personality with a name or face," he says. "We respect each other."

Every year Borders organizes an off-site road trip for the managers. He wants to get them away from the club for a few days to "do a little contemplative thinking." They go hiking, fishing and camping, among other things. Borders says he knows his managers better because of time spent outside of the club. They also know each other better.

That's evident by how playful they are around each other. Several of the managers got together for lunch recently at the club. Over sandwiches, they told hilarious stories about past road trips. There was much guffawing going on over the clang of silverware.

Longo and Cole told tales from a canoe and camping trip the managerial team took to the Okefenokee Swamp in northern Georgia a few years ago. A big part of the fun was the bus ride to and from the desti-

Their time is up.

Starts working in hours — even minutes.



nation. That's when Mangum donned his practical joker hat. If someone dozed off on the bus, Mangum took out his wife's fingernail polish and painted the napper's nails. Nobody was safe, not even his boss Borders, who had his nails glossed in red by Mangum after nodding off.

Longo watched Mangum in action and giggled like he was watching a "Seinfeld" rerun. He made sure not to fall asleep and become Mangum's next fool. But later, when Longo got off the bus to stretch his legs, he couldn't believe what he saw when he looked at his sandals: red toenails. He had no idea how Mangum pulled off the caper.

Longo still laughs about the stunt and enjoys telling the story. But he realizes Mangum never would have done it if he thought Longo would have been offended by it. It's an obvious sign of the camaraderie the two men have formed. "We're able to work better by getting a little closer to each other," Longo says.

The management staff has benefited by avoiding the pitfalls that occur at other clubs. The managers are careful not to get caught in any club politics. For instance, if a member voices a complaint to Mangum about Anderson, Mangum will tell the member, "Maybe you ought to go talk to him about



The club's tennis pro, Brian Marcus, made the mistake of dozing off on the bus ride home from one of the group's outings. Look closely at Marcus' fingernails, which were painted by Mangum.

it. I'm sure there's more to this than meets the eye."

While the managers strive to learn more about each other's jobs, Mangum says that doesn't mean they want each other's jobs.

"You want to understand their sides of the business and what they're going through," Mangum says. "But I don't want the golf pro's job, and I don't the general manager's job. I've got enough to do."

Mangum has heard the stories about the pros and superintendents or the general

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**They can crawl,
but they can't hide.**

No buffer zones to worry about.



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managers and superintendents who despise each other. Poor communication probably has something to do with their poor relationships, he says. Jealously could also be involved.

Mangum says the Atlanta Athletic Club strives to have clear guidelines that don't put managers in conflict. Some club rules just ask to create dissension, Mangum says. For instance, if the pro makes money on golf car use, he wants to send golf cars out as often as he can. But a superintendent who gets a bonus because of excellent course conditions does not want golf cars to go out on the course if

it's remotely wet. It's a recipe for conflict.

Mangum and Anderson, who have a steadfast relationship, are careful not to fall into such traps. They try to accommodate each other's needs. For instance, Mangum's maintenance crew often sprays pesticides and fertilizes on Monday, the day the two courses are closed. But if Anderson has a chance to book a big-revenue outing on that day, Mangum will postpone the maintenance tasks willingly.

"That's what's best for the club," he says.

Says Anderson: "It's not always about me running numbers through the golf shop, and it's not always about Ken being able to show off his course the best he can show it off. There has to be a give and take, and there is. Ken and I are on the same page."

No one wants to make any predictions of how much longer the team will stay together. Will Mangum, Borders, Anderson and the others make it to 25 years? How about 40?

Really, though, it's astonishing that the team has stayed together this long, especially in an industry well known for its transience.

"Sometimes the moon is just in the right phase," Borders says. "Sometimes the karma just happens."

One thing is for sure — what they've got going on at the Atlanta Athletic Club is something to smile about. ■

Members of the staff often meet for lunch, including (left to right) Jimmy Cole, Vincent Longo, Darin Armour and Ken Mangum.



PHOTO BY: LARRY AYLWARD

**They've never
seen anything like it.**

New mode of action catches them off guard.

