



LETTERS FROM THE LEAGUE

League Membership,

We are excited to publish our second edition of the *Letters from the League*, a semi-annual digital publication of articles submitted by our CMEC graduates. We currently have 19 graduates and expect the list to grow in January as several candidates complete the certification process. These candidates have submitted their essays and will complete their interview while at the Symposium. Speaking of the Symposium, we hope you have all submitted your registration to attend the Footing Academy and/or the Symposium which is to be hosted in Tulsa, OK on January 18-23, 2019. With the topics scheduled, there is sure to be a good exchange of information during the educational sessions, round table discussions and tours. Networking with your peers at the Symposium is always a highlight as well. If you haven't yet registered there is still time. [Click here](#) for the link to the registration form as well as the hotel reservation information.

In this edition, you will find a couple of articles on customer service, information on employee retention, and an interesting article on the Value of the League submitted by Mark Darsey. We hope you find these articles to be a good source of information or maybe cause some excitement about attending the upcoming Footing Academy/Symposium. It's just a few weeks away! Wishing you all a very happy holiday season!

The League Education Committee

Customer Service and Why It Matters

By: Summer Ivey-Platt, CMEC

Customer Service has become one of the biggest factors in keeping our facility competitive. It has become more important as new facilities open and old facilities do better advertising. All of our local facilities are trying to secure the limited amount of customers in our area. Operating long established facilities is a double-edged sword; it can mean a good repeat customer base, but it can also mean newer facilities can lure customers away with bigger, better, or fancier amenities. It has become extremely important to be able to respond to customers quickly, efficiently, and effectively. The St. Lucie County Fairgrounds Equestrian and Event Center has

managed to have a customer retention rate of 75-85% because we make sure our customers are happy with the staff's performance.

One example of how important customer service is to your facility can be illustrated by how we started having a large number of dog agility trials at our facility, this has occurred because most of the other equestrian facilities in the area don't offer arena grooming for their events. The dog show groups are mostly uneducated about footing and didn't realize it made a difference. The first agility trial we had was due to a scheduling conflict at another facility. The original venue booked a military re-enactment during the dog show so there were explosions, gun fire, and helicopters operating during a dog show. Stop and think about what bad customer service that really is! Two groups are having you host their event, but staff never considered if the events are compatible together. The dog club was not willing to take the chance of that happening again so they requested our facility instead. The week of the event we watered and groomed the arena just as if the event were a horse show. The participants were so happy they asked how we got the arena so nice. We explained the processes and the training received at the footing academy. They participants were hooked and soon all of the other clubs followed the first club and we still book a couple of new agility trials each year.

The key is to know your customer and meet their needs. You can have a beautiful well-maintained facility, but without the commitment to your customers how can you expect them to be loyal to you? A lot of facilities can meet an event's needs, but I have found that the difference in landing an event and keeping that event are how you treat the customer before, during, and after the event.

One way we make sure we are taking care of the customers is to provide an after-event questionnaire. It allows us to see where we had gaps in service and if there are ways to make their experiences better. Everyone we have provided the questionnaire to has commented that no other facility has ever care AFTER the event before. Setting yourself apart in how you treat customers helps retain your customers and that customer will become one of the best forms of advertising. The customer is the most important part of your facility. If you don't have customers you just have a plot of grounds that is useless.

The Importance of Customer Service at Our Facility

By: Mary Gipaya, CMEC

I have believed from the beginning of our contract to run Horseman's Park, over 8 years ago, that customer service would be the key to our success. From working in other industries prior to joining Equine Event Management, I could see that some of the most successful business, however big or small, depended on this concept as a core element of their business plan. Borrowing from some of these companies' key elements of customer service, we designed our plan.

1. The customer is always right.

Well that is a tough element of customer service, as we all know that many times they are not. Trying to stay true to your company's policies, rules and regulations can sometimes prove a bit difficult when dealing with this type of customer. Through some trial and error, we concluded that consistency in what we said or did would be our best defense when a tough decision had to be made. We had to make the customer feel as they were "right" but protect our Park and company.

2. Giving that extra step or going that extra mile.

Attentiveness to what the client might need for their event has been a big key to our success. If you can educate yourself with the type of events and the details and/or need of events being held at your facility, your job will be much easier. A little education goes a long way. One of the reasons that our company got this contract to run the Park was that between Equine Event Managements' owners, there was quite a bit of knowledge of equestrian events. The County P&R department did not have any equestrians working as staff for them that had enough knowledge to run an equestrian facility. Luckily, they realized this fact, and put the contract out to bid. In the beginning, if we found out that we did not know much about a certain type of event that wanted to book, we would try to educate ourselves. We would talk to respected individuals in the fields, so we could be aware of what an event of this type may need or want. Therefore, we could stay one step ahead. Attending the LAEC symposiums and footing academies has also proven most helpful.

3. Clear Communication.

This maybe the most critical element of good customer service.

Like with the game of telephone where you tell the first person in a line of others a sentence or phrase that they need to pass down to the next person, and by the end it is totally different from the original phrase, bad communication can be like that.

We have come up with a system of checks and balances for each event so that all parties are clear on what is needed and expected from each other. Written communication is also key. We have forms that are filled out by the customer and reviewed by our staff and passed on to our maintenance team that will working each event. No one likes paperwork, but this can be quite important if someone has unrealistic expectations of what is being done by each party. It is also helpful in keeping all parties on task to meet deadlines such as providing needed paperwork like permits, insurance, etc. It also provides a paper trail should a dispute arise later. We try to keep it simple yet useful.

4. Respect.

Respect the fact that customers pay our salaries or help generate profits for our company or entity. Make them feel important and appreciated and treat them as individuals. We try to remain polite, even if they are asking irritating questions, or are not communicating with you in a respectful manor. If you thank them every time you get the chance you might just make their day.

In conclusion, no matter what size of facility you run or help manage, you will always be a success with good customer service skills.

Employee Retention

By: Roe DeLecce, CMEC

No matter how large or small a company the key to success often lies with the employees on staff. Hiring and keeping good employees is a challenge no one really looks forward to. However, once you hire those great employees it is crucial to keep them. So, what are some techniques to help ensure that your time and effort to secure the best possible candidate has not been wasted?

Speaking from the perspective of a very small company, one that at most has one full-time and two part-time employees, I can assure you that there is considerable time and effort put forth to ensure our employees have longevity within the company. Let's face it, hiring an employee costs time and money and a small business on a tight budget needs to be diligent in getting the process right.

One of the first steps in keeping an employee is hiring the right person for the job. Make sure that you are transparent in the duties and obligations that are expected. No one likes to be hired for a position only to find out that it is not the job they were hired for. We are forthright in explaining that there can be some very labor intense days, as that is an area we find to be critical in the decision-making process on the part of the potential employee.

Once we have the employee on board, we make a strong effort to offer the proper training. No one likes to be thrown to the wolves, and in our industry, it seems like only the strong survive! The training covers not only administrative procedures, but in the field, hands on customer service, as well as interaction with facility maintenance staff. We want our staff to have a broad *working* knowledge of how to handle any issue that may arise.

Good employees are priceless and we strive to treat each as such. We are competitive in compensation and reward those that go above and beyond with gift cards and bonuses. A small token of appreciation goes a long way. In addition, we constantly offer verbal praise and acknowledge the small daily tasks our employees do to keep the business running smoothly.

Our particular company has a full-time employee with a young child. We understand the importance of attending school functions or having to tend to a sick child. With that in mind, we grant time off to attend school functions or stay home with a sick child. We also allow our employee to bring her child in on school holidays.

While these perks may not work for every business it should give some insight on what you can do in your business to keep your valued employees. Be respectful of your employees, always remember where you started. Don't be afraid to make your employees responsible and accountable. They will usually step up to take on the task and wind up feeling like a truly integral part of the company!

The Value of the League to Me and My Facility

By: Mark Darsey, CMEC

Having been involved with the League for many years I thought I would reflect on what the League has meant to myself personally and what it has meant to my facility. The League has been instrumental in how we conduct our business when it comes to Agriculture and Equine Events.

My first interaction with the League was in Glen Rose Texas somewhere around 2003. Mr. Dooley contacted my director and recommended that we attend the Symposium. With great anticipation we made the trip and were not disappointed. The topics that were discussed and the people that we made contact with have been beneficial from that day forward. Since that first symposium I have gained more knowledge and insight than I ever thought I could gain.

The League has grown not only in membership but also in diversity. The facilities and the managers have continued to become more and more involved and I believe that over time this organization will be the premier association for people to come to for education and leadership. With the League making advancements in education, footing, and having a legitimate certification process there is no limit to the growth of this organization. I have used the League to my advantage not only from the education of myself but also from the standpoint of me being

able to let clients know who they are dealing with when it comes to their events. When clients start asking about how we prepare our grounds and our facility for their specific shows, and they find out that I have been educated, trained, and certified by some of the best managers and instructors from around the country it stops a lot of their questions and concerns.

Celebrating 20 years of this great association is a true milestone but I believe that it is only the beginning. I expect to see greater innovations and more involvement from facilities around the United States and beyond.

Thank you for taking the time to read our second edition of the
Letters from the League!

[Click here](#) for more information about the CMEC Program.

SAVE THE DATE!

The Winter League Footing Academy - January 18-19, 2019

The League Symposium 2019 - January 20-23, 2019

Hosted by the [Expo Square](#) in Tulsa, OK.

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