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The Hartford Club brings together people who want to help Hartford

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The outside of The Hartford Club is elegant and formidable, with two columns standing strong and inflexible against colonial brick. That's why Hartford's last and largest city club is often stereotyped as a traditional enclave of privilege, an unchanging nexus of exclusivity, toasted with martinis and Macanudos.

Maybe there are clubs out there where that picture is true. But that's not what's happening here. The purpose of a club, after all, isn't to serve meals and cocktails. It's to bring together like-minded people. In this case, that means people who want to help the Hartford area, and who are in positions to do something about it.

For the Hartford Club, this is a time to reassert its leadership mission. As with most organizations - public, private or non-profit - the economic dysfunction of the last 18 months has posed significant challenges for the Hartford Club. Yet, true to its history of being a place that cultivates innovative thinkers, the club is being proactive and creative in overcoming those obstacles.

Also true to its character, many of the things the club is doing include reaching out to the community, to involve even more people and organizations with the club's success.

Over the past year, for example, the Hartford Club began a new program that aids the region's non-profits. Many have seen their funding slip, others have proactively tightened their budget allocations. The Hartford Club reached out to the organizations, and created a special membership class so leaders of those non-profits could interact with the club's influential roster, and allowing them to use the club facilities to promote their aims. This special "associate membership" is free to the non-profit organizations. Since instituting the program, more than a dozen Greater Hartford non-profits - from the Wadsworth Atheneum to the Girl Scouts - have enrolled in the service.

Rather than being inwardly focused, the Hartford Club has been working hard to communicate its leadership commitment to the health and well-being of the Hartford region. That's why the club revamped its internal newsletter, The Prospect, into a glossy bi-monthly magazine for Greater Hartford. The publication goes far beyond the club's membership, reaching more than 10,000 professionals in the Capital Region. The magazine isn't a fluffy listing of social events. It's examined the foreclosure issues facing the city's business district, and pinned local bankers down about the availability of capital. It's also looked at the performance of the state's chief justice, and talked about why environmentalism is being preached from the pulpits throughout the area. The Prospect isn't a tout for the Hartford Club, it's an unfettered voice for ideas and opportunities, a reflection of what the club itself is talking about.

Outreach like this pays dividends. New membership inquiries are at an all-time high, and monthly applications are consistently at levels two to three times what they were in the past few years. The club's event business has been strong, and its share of social events, such as weddings, has more

than doubled so far this year.

The club provides a variety of events each month for the enjoyment of our members, such as cooking classes, wine tastings and cigar dinners. Club events are excellent opportunities for connecting with fellow members. Club members also enjoy participating in inter-clubs, such as the Wine Club, Book Club, Cigar Club, Texas Hold'em, Ballroom Dance Club and a monthly speaker series called the Power Hour.

The Hartford Club offers reciprocity with nearly 250 clubs worldwide for dining, private events, accommodations and golf.

The Hartford Club is about the people who use it. It's about being a central place, where the arts, business and political worlds all meet. It's about creating an atmosphere where ideas can flourish, and be acted on, by people who have the will and the wherewithal to do so.

In its 137-year history, the club has given much to Hartford, and endured much. The club's yesterdays are ones of adaptation, fortitude and service. Those are also its tomorrows. And that's the picture of the Hartford Club that will endure.

Larry Brown is president of The Hartford Club.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540