

Blue Jeans - The Crossroads of Tradition and Change

By Robert A Sereci, CCM
Medinah Country Club

June 2015

Whenever I arrive at a new path in my career, I truly try to take my time to assess the landscape and measure my approach to adjusting policies, procedures, staffing, culture, etc. Having stated this, I would like to have a discussion that some may seem as trivial; others will welcome the conversation and some will repel with great disdain. Though Medinah is a very special place, and stands alone amongst the top echelon of American Country Clubs, it does share some elements that I have found at every club along my route.

I would like to beg everyone's indulgence and to ask for your engagement of ...are you ready...blue jeans. Now I know that some of you are thinking; "what is the big deal about blue jeans, I wear them all the time." While this is true for many of us at home and while we're about town but within the friendly confines of Medinah Country Club this article of clothing is taboo and forbidden.

Dress codes are extremely important to any organization's culture or standard of existence, but in the case of country club life, dress codes may be a very influential deterrent to someone contemplating joining a club. Dress codes do not play a direct role when a prospective member is deciding to join a particular club, however; rigid dress codes may subconsciously influence that prospective member in how they perceive the club community. To me, belonging to a country club is like adding a room onto your house. Your club is an extension of your living space and should be a location where you go to escape work, stress or to find your personal happy place. The key component to a club's success and longevity is member usage. To influence any member to frequently use their club we must take the proper measures to ensure that they feel comfortable in their surroundings. I think it is important to note that this conversation has already started as several members have broached this topic with me in our club discussions.

Please don't get me wrong, I love tradition, history and prestige, but I also value diversity and have a strong sense of reality when it comes to changing times and minds. Not too long ago, attending your Sunday church service meant putting on your best suit and tie or modeling your favorite fashionable dress. Now, it is commonplace to see casual wear that includes collarless shirts, ladies' slacks, Nike shoes and yes: Blue Jeans.

One of the push backs that I always hear is; "we tried casual Friday at work and it didn't work very well." I agree, it doesn't work well in the workplace. But your club is not work. The other one is: "Many Chicago clubs do not allow denim." While that may be true, I also think it is important that we shy away from adopting the policies of other clubs and focus on ourselves, developing policies that speak directly to our club's culture and demographics. We are Medinah

and not the other guys.

Here is my major cause of concern and the real reason that I present this topic for discussion: For any club's long range existence, it always relies on attracting new generations of members. With each new generation come different mind sets, customs and desires. To ask a new member today to dress like the membership did in 1970 would naturally make them think, "I don't want to be a part of that scene. Members do not join clubs because of dress codes, however; they will choose a club where they feel comfortable and find aspects of commonality.

So now here we are at the crossroads of tradition and change. How do we avoid the collision? I would like to ask everyone to think about how we may achieve a "win – win." We need to respect the desire of the member who enjoys dressing up at the club and wants to be surrounded by like appearances, while at the same time find opportunities for the new generation member to be casually comfortable in their environment. To me, the answer is developing geographical zones with specific dress codes. Just like we expect our golfers to wear a collared shirt and appropriate pants, and we prefer not to see tee shirts, or for that matter someone golfing in a suit coat, we define areas where the wearing of jeans will be acceptable.

This will call for baby steps and clarity of thought, not to mention some trial and error. Friends, we can do this! For those of you who dabble in the art of linguistics, I remind you that Latin became a dead language because its structure did not accommodate for change.