

A PASSION FOR HELPING

GABE SORIA HAS BEEN A PART OF THE RECREATION DEPARTMENT FOR TWO YEARS, AND HAS ALWAYS FOUND JOY IN PUTTING SMILES ON MEMBERS' FACES.

BY ASHLEY RYAN

Being at the right place at the right time led Gabe Soria to the Newport Beach Country Club, though he did make a few stops along the way.

After graduating from Tesoro High School in Rancho Santa Margarita, he started out working as a server for Nordstrom Café before working in sales and, later, as a service manager for 24 Hour Fitness. Then, everything changed at Taco Surf, a restaurant in Dana Point.

At the eatery simply to pick up a pair of headphones, he started chatting with his friend's roommate about her career and, upon hearing that she worked for Lake Forest Golf and Practice Center, asked if she had any openings. Though Soria was already working full time at the gym, he took a part-time job with her as well.

That mystery woman was Natalie Bernal, the Newport Beach Country Club's current recreation

manager. In the summer of 2016, when she left the Lake Forest course in favor of NBCC, she asked Soria to come with her. "I kind of wanted a chance, so I took a gamble and went with her, and that was the best decision I ever made," he says. "Working with Natalie is awesome and she really puts a smile on my face every time I go to work."

While at Lake Forest, Soria was a staff member for the pro shop, booking tee times and selling memberships. Noting that it was a good learning experience, Soria had found his true calling, and worked his way up from a recreation attendant to becoming the recreation supervisor at NBCC. For nearly two years, he has honed his skills, splitting his time between overseeing the staff and helping out the club's members and guests.

There are a few areas in particular that Soria maintains, including the men's locker room, where he restocks things like razors, combs and lotions. On top of that, he ensures that the club is running smoothly, making sure that employees take their breaks when they're supposed to and even doubling up as a swim instructor, when necessary.

"I'll check the calendar and if there's an appointment for the day, like a 1 o'clock session, I'll just [get] in the water for about 20 to 30 minutes to help out a child who's learning to swim," Soria says. "It's one of my favorite things to do here."

But, even with all of these tasks, he still makes time for the members. "My favorite thing about my job is taking care of the members.



You know, it's my passion. I like taking care of people," he explains. "If someone is feeling under the weather, I'll go out of my way to go to the kitchen and make them a ginger honey tea. ... It's such a little thing, [but] their face, their expression, ... I really enjoy that."

While the last couple of years have given Soria many memorable moments, including the awe on members' faces when the club renovation was completed back in 2016, he notes that there was something special about bonding with his co-workers outside of the club.

Before the 2017 summer staff picnic, an annual event hosted by the country club, Soria met up with General Manager Casey Kaut and Golf Course Superintendent Ron Benedict in Dana Point and the trio hopped on their motorcycles to ride

up Pacific Coast Highway to the event together. "We [all had] such a great time. It reminded me of the movie 'Wild Hogs'," Soria says.

While riding motorcycles is one of his favorite pastimes, other hobbies include going to the gym, cooking seafood and surfing with friends at nearby beaches. But, even though

he spends his days off enjoying life, his dedication and passion for his job still shine through.

"I'm here for the long run at the country club," Soria notes. "I love working here. Hopefully I can grow and someday be a [general manager] at a country club myself. That's my future."



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