

Meet Steve Ator, Dill Dinkers of Cockeysville

Jim Ries: Hello and welcome to Java with Jim. I'm Jim Ries, Director of Business Development at Offit Kurman, joined here today with Steve Ator, Owner at Dill Dinkers of Cockeysville. How are you, Steve?

Steve Ator: I'm doing great, Jim. Thanks for having me.

Jim Ries: Good, good. So Steve, tell us about Dill Dinkers of Cockeysville. How did you get into it?

What do you do there? What makes your company different from other companies in your industry?

Steve Ator: Well, thank you for the question.

Steve Ator: I've been a lifelong sports enthusiast. I've played football, basketball, baseball, growing up. Love sports to this day. Interestingly enough, my wife actually saw an ad on LinkedIn, said, Hey there's this company called Dill Dinkers.

They're opening up indoor pickleball. Don't you think that's something you might want to do? I thought about, I've been in corporate America for 25 years. Did relatively well for myself, but got tired of working for somebody else. So I looked at the numbers, I went down and met the owner, Will [00:01:00] Richards. We had a discussion about the franchise model and before you know it, I hemmed and hauled and thought about it and figured out, Hey, I want to give this a shot. I signed the agreement with Will and after looking at Dill Dinkers, I'm the owner at Cockeysville, as you mentioned. The thing that separates Dill Dinkers from everybody else it's building the community.

It's really about a family and friend and building that environment where you really want to escape your day job. You want to escape the problems that you have and you want to come play pickleball, which is arguably the fastest growing sport in the United States, as most people know since COVID. It's a very social sport.

It's a lot of fun with family and friends. For me, it was a no brainer. And we've been doing it now for about a year. We'll be in business of September 7th, will be one year at Cockeysville.

Jim Ries: Yeah. Congrats. And Steve, I have to admit, I've played there many times and I can attest to the culture and the experience and the family and friends atmosphere that you alluded to.

No question about it. It's a lot of fun. So Steve, when it comes [00:02:00] to Dill Dinkers of Cockeysville, what would you say you're most proud of in your almost one year?

Steve Ator: I would say there's a lot of things I'm proud of, but what I'm as proud of is the community that we're building. We've got over 500 annual members, over 3,400 visitor members at the club. We've gotten off to a really nice start.

We won franchise of the year at our convention in June. So we've had a good start, but, every day it's just another day to provide excellence, to provide that great customer service. It's really about building that community is what we're doing every day. That's what's most rewarding for me is when I see people come in and they enjoy themselves and again, it's that release getting away from something potentially or just come and have fun.

That's what's most rewarding for me.

Jim Ries: Yeah. What do the next six months look like for you and Dill Dinkers of Cockeysville?

Steve Ator: Well, we're going to have a week long celebration, September 15th of this year to celebrate that one year. And we're going to cap it off on a Friday night with [00:03:00] a members only party with food and drink.

The next six months for me is just a continuation, continue to build that community, continue to get out into the Cockeysville, Hunt Valley, Baltimore County area, get the word out that we're there and we're there for family and friends and for fun, and so a continuation of doing what we've done, the first 10 months. That's really what we're going to do.

Jim Ries: Yeah. Pickleball is definitely a fast growing sport and you guys provide a wonderful venue for people to have fun and get together with family and friends. It's really awesome what you guys are doing, so we all appreciate that. Steve, you said you're a sports guy.

You played at least three sports, maybe more in your younger years. You're a real enthusiast, but what is it that most people watching this video don't know about you?

Steve Ator: I'm an avid golfer. I love to golf. I don't play as much as I used to play, but I would play every day if I could. Growing up I was probably the most competitive person you'd ever meet.

I've turned that [00:04:00] into my business now, trying to be competitive and win every day. But really I've turned the competitive off on the court. I love to play with all the members. I never realized getting out on the court as the owner how much that means to a lot of people. Very hands-on.

And like you said, you're there. I play with people of all levels. I'm a decent player, not a great player, but I can hold my own against most. I just love the comradery of playing with the members when they come in, when I have a chance, when I have an opportunity.

Jim Ries: You are really doing what you love, so I can imagine that it's really not work for you.

Congratulations on what you're building and will continue to build there at Dill Dinkers of Cockeysville. And thanks for spending time with us today.

Steve Ator: Jim, I appreciate the opportunity for getting along with you and I really appreciate the time. Thank you.

Jim Ries: You betcha. See you soon.