

EAGA Business Builder

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Today's speaker was Roger Linn—i9 Sports



Roger (along with his wife, Jamie) operates the i9 Sports program in Albuquerque, Rio Rancho and Edgewood. They have two future program participants in young daughters Georgia and June (the dress-up girl). Roger is named after Dallas Cowboys football quarterback, Roger Staubach. Mr. Linn is still a fan of that team, but with the Cowboys success drought of the past few years (or quarter century), Roger is mentioning more of his other sports loyalties these days. He has been a fan of the Los Angeles professional basketball teams for a long time and was quite familiar with the 20 year career of Kobe Bryant. Roger was fortunate enough to attend a recent game at the Staples Center and was able to see the amazing outpouring of tributes to Mr. Bryant. Roger has been a fan for so long that back in the day (which would be

1998) he was a proud owner of a pair of shoes from Kobe Bryant's first shoe endorsement deal. Roger says that the pair cost about \$149 and that he was able to fund the purchase from door-to-door sales of the old Coke discount cards. Mr. Linn and his buddy were entrepreneurs...but were not greedy. They figured out how to raise money from the undistributed cards that they found, but then quit the venture as soon as they had raised the needed shoe money. These days, Roger has discovered a new adventure to occupy his work day (and that usually doesn't mean 9 to 5). In 2011, Roger and Jamie began operating the Albuquerque (including Rio Rancho and Edgewood) franchise of i9 Sports. The name "i9" means "i to the 9th power" and comes from the nine key components of their approach to youth sports: imaginative, innovative, interactive, integrity-driven, impassioned, inspirational, instructional, insightful and inclusive. Although each of the words describes a particular, and important, feature of the program, probably the two most important of them are 'integrity-driven' and 'inclusive'. The i9 Sports program stresses sportsmanship to the nth degree. In addition to the initial notice of expectation, Roger and his group also provide for in-season sportsmanship education classes, and they provide yard signs for "Sportsman of the Week" award winners. The i9 program structure requires that all participants share an equal amount of participation time. The required participation allows youngsters to actually get experience in playing different sports. That, in turn, gives the kids an opportunity to figure out which sport(s) are of most interest. The i9 operation works to provide the children with a safe and fun (heavy on the FUN) environment; that is convenient (both in location and time commitment); and that is in a comfortable atmosphere-allowing for buddy requests (with balance) and coach requests (within reason), without the need for try-outs (which can be stressful and detrimental to the overall goal). As noted earlier, Roger began their local business in 2011. The first year, they offered 3 sports and had 200 participants. Nine years later, the program now offers 10 sports and has over 1,700 participants per season—expected to grow to 2,400 participants this spring. The growth and positive reputation are not just the result of good advertising. The success is from hard work, planning and genuine care. Roger spends a lot of his time on the 'behind-the-scenes' tasks that are needed to make the 'on-stage' activities work out right. He has to establish and develop relationships with school administrations and parks and recreation department personnel so that i9 can get a fair share of land use and field space for events. He has to build teams, find and assign officials, coaches, instructors and other staff. Then there is the communications network to establish and maintain; the training of the coaches and officials; the marketing; and the partnerships with sponsors and other pertinent organizations that require a fair amount of personal time. Roger seems to be up to the task though. He and Jamie are even expanding their i9 footprint a bit. Last year, they acquired another franchise territory. This one in California. In the short time that the Linns have been operating that franchise, it has increased membership by about 67%; revenue by about 48% and registrations by about 38%. In his recent trip to the left coast, Mr. Linn was even able to work out a partnership with the LA Clippers basketball organization, where the Clippers will assist with promoting the i9 program, and will provide a few of their alumni players to participate in some of the i9 program clinics. If your family has a youngster (age 3 to 14) that would be interested in participating in one of the i9 sports, you can find out more about what they offer by contacting Roger at 505-312-4999. Or visit their local entity website at <https://www.i9sports.com/ProgramDirector/280/Albuquerque-Rio-Rancho-Edgewood> for additional information and for getting signed up. When you sign up someone, don't forget to use the discount code "EAGA20" and get a \$20 reduction in the fee. If you don't have any participants of your own, you can still contact Roger to get information about sponsorships, or find out how you can become a mentor of our future residents (as a coach or official). Or, since i9 encourages parents to attend the sporting events, you could become one of the always useful sportsmanship monitors in the stands.

- ◆ March 17th will be 'Prospective Member Day'. If you know of a business that would be a worthy addition to our group, bring their representative to our meeting on that day. Remember that we are interested in quality members, and please be sure to verify that the perspective member's category will not conflict with that of an existing member. Let Mario know if you are bringing a guest so that there will be sufficient space and food available. Mario's contact information is at the bottom of this page.
- ◆ For our next meeting—February 25th:
The greeter will be Soren Thomsen—TEMA Furniture and the speaker will be Mark Abramson—Los Ranchos Gun Shop.

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