



FOCUS

40 UNDER 40 2005

Photo: Marc Hauser

Jason Erkes

36 ■ **President** ■ **Sport & Social Clubs Inc.**

■ **Why him?** With friend and nightclub business partner Marc Bortz, Jason Erkes took the Lincoln Park meet-and-greet from bankruptcy to solvency.

Like many young urban professionals, the two had played in the club's sports leagues, but they had no professional interest in the company until a friend mentioned its owner was considering Chapter 11.

Knowing that the clubs' single, college-educated, 21-to-35-year-old crowds were an advertiser's dream, the duo decided to buy the company. That was in 2001, when it had \$2.1 million in gross revenue and a roster of 45,000 participants among clubs scattered in 22 cities.

Today, the restructured company has annual revenues of \$3.6 million and 80,000 participants in just four cities: Chicago, San Francisco, Philadelphia and Orlando, Fla. Profits, which were non-existent in 2001, are up nearly 400%, Mr. Erkes says.

How did he turn it around? Old-fashioned pressing the flesh.

"He's well-received by groups because when they meet him, they feel like they've always known him," says Roland Burris, whose 1994 gubernatorial run Mr. Erkes helped manage.

■ **Off the clock:** Despite the nature of his job, he prefers a political debate to a Cubs game.

Margaret Littman