



# Metropolitan Golf Writers Association NEWSLETTER

JULY 2013

## MGWA Member Spotlight

### GEORGE WILLIS



As a kid in grade school, I was a huge fan of the NFL, specifically the Oakland Raiders with Kenny Stabler, Jack Tatum, Cliff Branch and the boys. Anytime there was a game on, I was in front of the television. On occasion, especially when the Raiders played the Chiefs, I'd fake a stomach ache just so I could stay home from church and watch the game.

But as much as I loved football, my first sports hero was Lee Trevino, Super Mex he was called then. I grew up in Las Cruces, New Mexico, which is 45 minutes north of El Paso, Texas. That's where Trevino was living in 1971 when he took golf by storm, winning the U.S. Open and the British Open.

He beat Jack Nicklaus at Merion Golf Club to win that U.S. Open, which was his second, and while I wasn't an avid follower of golf then, I knew Jack Nicklaus was the best player on the planet and I knew Super Mex beating the Bear was a big deal.

It was so big they had a parade in El Paso for Trevino. It was a hero's welcome that I saw replayed on the local television stations. The nearest pro franchise was the Cowboys in Dallas. So Trevino was our pro superstar.

It was because of Trevino I found an old putter and a couple of used golf balls and would practice my putting stroke by hitting the ball into a cup on the carpet of my house. As an only child you invent games to play. You might be alone, but in your mind you're Lee Trevino and you're playing in the U.S. Open.

## SEND IN YOUR NEWS AND NOTES

All members of the MGWA who may have items for our newsletter are urged to e-mail them to **Chuck Stogel** ([chstogel@aol.com](mailto:chstogel@aol.com)).

## AZINGER, AWARDS DINNER DRAW 600-PLUS

More than 600 golf enthusiasts attended the Metropolitan Golf Writers Association's 62nd National Awards Dinner on Tuesday, June 18, at the Westchester Marriott. The turnout represented one of the largest audiences in several years, all enjoying a very rewarding evening. The presentations, and acceptances — and accompanying videos — were particularly touching. **Paul Azinger** capped off the affair by providing the gathering with an entertaining, enlightening, breezy and, sometimes, slightly irreverent response in accepting our Gold Tee award. His personal stories of behind-the-scenes events during his years as a PGA TOUR player, as winning 2008 U.S. Ryder Cup captain and as a television commentator were most interesting and revealing.

The "goodie bag" provided to each attendee at this year's dinner contained an extra special treat. In addition to a variety of table favors, including a sleeve of new B330-RX balls with the MGWA logo donated by Bridgestone, everyone attending the awards event received an autographed copy of Azinger's book, *Cracking the Code*, which details the strategy and stories that led to the U.S. winning back the Ryder Cup in 2008. With help from several volunteers on Monday afternoon, Azinger signed all 600 books in an hour or so. Costs for the books were raised during the day on Tuesday when Azinger played a round of golf with three "benefactors" at Sleepy Hollow CC in Scarborough, NY. The trio comprised **Steve Stuart**, **Mark Kenyon** and MGWA member **Mike Beckerich**. The MGWA extends a special thanks to Sleepy Hollow for hosting this extraordinary outing.

For an article by the Journal News' **Mike Dougherty** about Met PGA Executive Director **Charlie Robson** receiving the MGWA Distinguished Service Award, go to: [http://www.lohud.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=2013305250063&nclink\\_check=1](http://www.lohud.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=2013305250063&nclink_check=1).

During the next few weeks, the MGWA Dinner Committee and Executive Committee will be reviewing the ledger for this year's dinner in advance of determining donations to our charitable beneficiaries... and in advance of planning for our 2014 awards dinner. An announcement about donations will be made in the fall.

Several MGWA members were winners in our dinner raffle and silent auction proceedings, including **Jim Walton**, whose raffle participation captured both the Rolex watch and the Bridgestone clubs/bag prizes. MGWA Exec Committee member **Dan Berger**, in conjunction with **Peter Goodman**, was the winning auction bidder on both the Bluegrass Experience trip and the Day of Golf-Plus at GlenArbor. And, MGWA member **Jon Peisinger** won four tickets in our raffle to the PGA TOUR's Barclays event this year at Liberty National.

The prize for the member selling the most raffle tickets went to **Chuck Stogel**, who returned \$380 worth. The prize consists of Dinner for Two at the highly rated Iron Horse Grill in Pleasantville, NY.



# NEWSLETTER

**(Continued)** In 1972, I played my first round of golf on an actual golf course. I was 12 years old. I wish I'd gotten the bug then and accepted an offer to take golf lessons. Tiger Woods might be chasing my record for major championships if I had.

But I didn't truly pick up the game until my freshman year of college. I had played football, basketball and baseball in high school, but began my journalism career during my freshman year in college and needed another athletic outlet to test myself. As a student I could buy a monthly card with a membership number for \$6 and play as much as I wanted. It was a good deal that got even better when you simply kept signing in with the same number long after your monthly card expired.

My first set of clubs came out of the shed where all the unclaimed and lost golf clubs were kept. No two clubs were from the same set or same brand for that matter. My golf shoes were flip flops. The golf balls we used were whatever we could find in the desert though you always had to stay on the lookout for rattle snakes.

I still love football and basketball. I also cover a lot of boxing and have authored a new book called "The Bite Fight," chronicling the infamous fight when Mike Tyson was disqualified for biting Evander Holyfield on the ear.

But golf still stirs my emotions the same way it did all those years ago when Trevino beat Jack and \$6 could keep me playing for months.

*George Willis has been a New York Post sports columnist since 1997, having previously worked at the NY Times and Newsday. He is the author of The Bite Fight: Tyson, Holyfield and the Night that changed boxing forever. Willis is a graduate and 2012 Distinguished Alumni recipient at New Mexico State University.*

## PGA OF AMERICA TO OPEN OFFICE AT GOLF CENTRAL

The PGA of America is establishing a regional office at Golf Central in Elmsford, NY. Golf Central is the headquarters for the Metropolitan Golf Association, Met PGA section, Women's Met Golf Association, Westchester Golf Association as well as a variety of other client associations, including the Metropolitan Golf Writers Association.

The PGA New York Office will be led by The PGA of America's Chief Marketing Officer, **Kevin Ring**, who will relocate to the area, for a planned Fall opening. According to a PGA release: "The space will be used by The PGA's Officers, Leadership Team and Staff, as the PGA prepares for its Centennial Celebration in 2016; the 98th PGA Championship at Baltusrol GC, Springfield, NJ, in 2016; and to foster deeper marketing, broadcasting, public relations and communications relationships in the world's largest media capital."

## PEOPLE, PLACES, ETC

The MGWA web site ([www.metgolfwriters.org](http://www.metgolfwriters.org)) is currently undergoing an upgrade under the supervision of MGWA Executive Administrator **Kate Keller**. The renovation is meant to achieve an online presence with greater flexibility and capacity. Members will receive an advisory when the transformation has been completed . . . Golf Riverhead, a company established by North Shore CC owner/developer **Donald Zucker**, has agreed to purchase bankrupt Long Island National GC for \$6 million. The property is being sold by Gatz Properties. A spokesman for the Zucker Organization told Newsday that the new owner plans to keep LI National as a golf course entity. The facility will eventually convert from semi-private to all private . . . Waitt Co. has reached an agreement to acquire all operating assets of the Bobby Jones brand from W Diamond Group, a New York based company owned and led by **Doug Williams** and his family. As part of this agreement, the Jones family and the W Diamond Group have agreed to provide Waitt a long-term license for the exclusive use of the Bobby Jones brand globally in connection with apparel, golf equipment and related products and accessories. Waitt will operate the Bobby Jones business under a newly formed affiliate, Jones Global Sports, and will assume all global operations. The current president of Bobby Jones, **Andy Bell**, will be promoted to CEO of Jones Global Sports. For further information: **Jared Kelowitz**, Senior Account Manager, JDPR, 864-233-3776; [jaredk@jdpr.com](mailto:jaredk@jdpr.com) . . . Forsgate CC, Monroe Township, NJ, named Ryan Dionne its new gm. Most recently, Dionne worked at Cherry Valley CC, Skillman, NJ, and previously at TPC Jasna Polana, Princeton, NJ

## ERNIE ELS LAUNCHES NEW TRAINING APP

Four Time Major winner **Ernie Els** has launched the Ernie Els Driven iPhone app in partnership with Driven Apps of New York. The iPhone training app offers customized training programs and video tutorials to help golfers improve their skills in every part of the game.

Ernie Els Driven is designed to give golfers of all ages and abilities access to the tips and practice drills on which Ernie built his renowned career. With step-by-step instructional videos and features that allow users to track and share their progress and use the swing analysis tool to compare their swing side-by-side with Ernie's, from multiple angles. The high quality tutorials allow users to follow Ernie's swing in slow motion, with instruction on swing fundamentals, chipping, putting, bunker shots, and much more. Ernie Els Driven is available in the App Store for \$4.99 and is currently the #1 sports app.

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/ernie-els-driven/id653180950?mt=8&ign-mpt=uo%3D2>

Driven Apps was co-founded by Don and **Joe Saladino** of Drive495. Joe, an accomplished amateur, was the Jerry Courville Sr. MGA Player of the Year in 2008 and 2010. Ernie Els Driven is the second app launched by Driven Apps. In late June, they launched their first app with Dwayne Wade of the Miami Heat, Dwayne Wade Driven. For more information on Driven Apps please visit <https://drivenplatform.com/>.



# NEWSLETTER

## MGWA DIRECTORY CHANGES

**Mailing addresses:** **Brett Avery**, 730 Columbus Ave., Apt. 11D, New York, NY 10025 ... **Steve Donahue**, 44 Buckwheat Hill Road, Watertown, CT 06795 ... **Stephen Foehl**, New Jersey State Golf Association, 3 Golf Drive - Suite 206, Kenilworth, NJ 07033 ... **Bill Nestor** 365 Timson Hill Road, Newfane, VT 05345 ... **Email addresses and phone numbers:** Wayne Kamidoi 917-287-7898 (cell phone) ... **Kyla Basso** (formerly Kyla Jones) [kbasso@paramountcountryclub.com](mailto:kbasso@paramountcountryclub.com) ... Omissions from the Executive Committee roster listed in the 2013 MGWA Membership Directory: **Ron Sirak**, Golf World; **Chuck Stogel**, freelance.

## BETHPAGE RECAP

A special panel discussion in conjunction with the 15th anniversary of the Black course renovations and reopening, was featured during the MGWA visit to Bethpage State Park, Farmingdale, NY, in May. Panelists included MGA Executive Director **Jay Mottola**, former parks honcho **Dave Catalano** and ex-greens superintendent **Craig Currier**.

Here's a report from MGWA Activities Committee member **Dave Donelson** (<http://davedonelsonteetogreen.blogspot.com>):

**Betsy Wintenberger**, Park Director, opened the meeting by recounting how she and other staffers at the time stood in awe of the amount of effort that went into preparing the course for the event.

Jay Mottola, Executive Director of the Metropolitan Golf Association, recounted how the Met Open led to the US Open. "We held the Met Opens in 1987 and 1988 at Winged Foot and Baltusrol," Mottola said. "The next year, we brought it to the Black. The pros in the Met PGA Section praised it, saying it was a good a course as either one of the two they had just played and would make a great US Open venue. It was easy for me to suggest it to David Fay."

Mottola pointed out that the USGA took a major risk by scheduling the event at the Black. "Some 80% of USGA revenue is connected to the US Open," he said. "To risk that the Black said a lot about the importance of public golf to the USGA."

The announcement energized the state park staff. "We had 27 full-time employees and a maintenance budget of \$600,000," related Dave Catalano, who was Park Director at the time. "I was scared to death to compete with the other great venues that had held the Open. The best decision I made at the beginning was to hire Craig Currier as Superintendent." It's worth noting that the staffing and maintenance budget covered not just the Black course, but the other four golf courses at the state facility as well.

Currier added, "It's probably a good thing I was only 26 years old at the time. I don't know that I could do it now." Course conditions were deplorable, he said. "It was a diamond in the rough, but it needed a lot of polishing. The course was totally overgrown. You couldn't see several holes because of the trees and bushes. Some of the bunkers had three feet of sand in them while the liners were poking through in others. You could lose a ball in some of those bunkers!"

He pointed out that, aside from hole 18, the other holes, routing, and even the bunkering wasn't changed for the Open.

Catalano explained that one goal of having the US Open at Bethpage was to elevate the entire complex, which has five golf courses and numerous other outdoor activities. "We set out to be the best public golf complex in the world," he said. "Each year since the renovation, we got an additional \$250,000 in rehab money to make sure the other courses received the attention they deserve. The Red course should be a top 100 course. Currier added some distance to it and removed some trees to open it up, but it's otherwise intact as Tillinghast made it."

At 7,100 yards, Currier added, "The Red is probably the best par 70 anywhere."

Mottola closed by saying, "The Bethpage staff and facility does so much more than host US Opens. They hold everything from the NY State and Long Island Opens to numerous junior events. They do so much for the game."

The only competition conducted by the MGWA at Bethpage was a nearest to the pin contest, won by **Mike Cohen**.

Lost pitching wedge: If anyone came away from Bethpage with an errant Ti9 Pro Custom Clubs pitching wedge in their bag, please contact MGWA member **Larry Stogel** ([stogelads@aol.com](mailto:stogelads@aol.com)).



# NEWSLETTER

## UPCOMING EVENTS

Rockrimmon, **Aug. 28**; Metropolis, **Sept. 24**.

**NOTE:** Members are invited to suggest possible golf-related presenters for our indoor meeting agenda at Rockrimmon and Metropolis. Please don't suggest general topics or presenters that you do not have direct contact with. Presenters have included authors, equipment reps, golf instructors, travel destinations, rules officials, and much more. Presenters often participate in a prize offering, to be determined. If you have a contact to suggest, please send an e-mail to **Chuck Stogel** of the MGWA Activities Committee ([chstogel@aol.com](mailto:chstogel@aol.com)).



*Former Golf Course Superintendent **Craig Currier**, former longtime Director at Bethpage State Park **Dave Catalano** and MGA Executive Director **Jay Mottola***



***Steve Stuart, Mike Beckerich, Paul Azinger and Mark Kenyon** at Sleepy Hollow*