

THE BOARDROOM

CELEBRATING 23 YEARS OF EDUCATING THE PRIVATE CLUB INDUSTRY

ISSUE 286 | VOLUME XXIII NOVEMBER/DECEMBER



Distinguished
Clubs from BOARDROOM
magazine

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION FOR THE
ASSOCIATION OF PRIVATE CLUB DIRECTORS



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PGA PRESIDENT SUZY WHALEY SAYS

“WE’RE BULLISH
ON THE GAME.”

Suzy Whaley, the 41st President of the PGA of America, also makes her mark as the first woman president in the 102-year-old organization’s history.

The PGA, established in April 1916, has the task of establishing and setting standards of the profession along with growing the interest and participation in the game of golf...an \$84 billion industry today.

The Association is home to about 29,000 men and women members who participate in men’s, seniors and women’s major championships, including the PGA Championship, the KitchenAid Senior PGA Championship and the KPMG Women’s PGA Championship. There’s also a focus on the biennial Ryder Cup, the PGA Cup and the Women’s PGA Cup.

While professional play remains a major purpose, the growth of the game of golf today is front and center for the PGA, as it promotes the growth and support of the game through various programs and events.

Suzy Whaley, the first woman to hold a national office with the PGA, served as secretary and then vice president before beginning her term as PGA President in 2018.

As a professional golfer, Whaley, in 2003, became the first woman in 58 years to qualify for a PGA Tour event, when she qualified for the 2003 Greater Hartford Open.

Earlier this year, Whaley was named to the top 100 teachers’ list from Golf Magazine; she is recognized as a top 50 female instructor, and a LPGA Teaching and Club Professional who played on the LPGA Tour in 1993.



PGA PRESIDENT SUZY WHALEY

She's certainly a member of a golfing family. Her husband, Bill, a PGA Professional and her first coach, works for the PGA Tour. Daughters Kelly and Jenn both attended college on golf scholarships, and Kelly made it through the first stage of qualifying school on the Symetra Tour.

Even as President, Whaley is the PGA director of instruction at the Country Club in Mirasol, Palm Beach Gardens, Florida.

In this Q and A with *BoardRoom magazine*, President Whaley talks about her vision for the PGA, the challenges and the roles of PGA Professionals, club executives and managers in the coming years.

BOARDROOM: *As PGA President and leader, what's your vision for the PGA of America in the coming years?*

PRESIDENT WHALEY: The PGA of America is one of the largest working sports organizations, with nearly 29,000 PGA Professionals helping people enjoy the game for a lifetime across the world. Together, with my fellow leaders and our executive team, our vision is to advance the livelihood of our Members, elevate the profession and help the game evolve. We are strategically focused on two paths: Creating opportunities for our Members and making golf a game that welcomes all.

One of our biggest challenges is actually one of our greatest opportunities. We want to get clubs in more people's hands and for the game to more closely resemble the communities we serve. We want more people of color on our courses, more women and more junior boys and junior girls playing golf. We want to pursue every avenue to let people know that golf is for everyone.



BOARDROOM: *In your opinion, what does the PGA do well now, and secondly, what can it improve upon?*

Our PGA Professionals are not only experts on the game and the sport's best coaches, but the tangible connection between golf facilities and all who play the game. While our Members represent the gold standard in golf, they are lifelong learners, continuously enhancing their skills, so they can deliver experiences that are valued by today's consumers.

We are committed to our Members, but also to all those we serve in the marketplace. Our partners – such as OMEGA, Cadillac, National Car Rental, Aon and many more – are extremely important to our mission. And these relationships, which drive brand awareness, remain strong.

Our Association also runs some of the most respected championships in the world: The PGA Championship – one of golf's four major championships for men; the KPMG Women's PGA Championship – a major championship in women's golf; the KitchenAid Senior PGA Championship – the oldest major championship in senior golf, and the Ryder Cup, a biennial competition with

We are all in this together, so it makes great sense for private clubs to work directly with PGA Professionals to overcome challenges that we may face. A challenge brings opportunity – to grow and enhance your business; to discover new pathways for revenues and profits; to reallocate resources; to launch new programs at your facility, such as PGA Jr. League, and more. Through collaboration, we can work together to identify areas of opportunity. It's a win-win situation for both the private club and the PGA Professional. The end result could pay dividends for years to come.

Europe that transcends golf as one of the most unique and tradition-rich competitions on the global sports calendar.

We've worked hard to put processes in place to increase inclusion across the board – in our membership, our governance, our suppliers and for those who play the game. We have a long way to go, but we believe in the plan we have in place and are encouraged by the progress we've made. We must continue to take steps to ensure everyone feels welcome in the industry, at the golf course and as fans.

We are also looking to promote the next generation of Career Services for our Members, to make sure we continue to have the best talent in the industry at all levels. This means growing the number of opportunities promoted, increasing industry satisfaction and facilitating underrepresented candidates. As well, we want to make our Members' lives better; help improve the health of facilities at which they work and leave the game in a better place than we found it.

BOARDROOM: *The PGA is expanding its educational certification opportunities for PGA Members. What do you see as the roles and responsibilities of PGA Professionals and Members, in light of the PGA's thrust in Member education? i.e. certification programs etc.? How does this expand the career possibilities for PGA Members? How have PGA Members received these programs?*

At the PGA of America, we continue to evolve and enhance the curriculum for our Members and for our certifications beyond membership. We recommend all PGA Professionals take advantage of advanced learning and are pleased to see engagement increasing every year.

As we further promote advanced education and its value to the marketplace, employers will understand the levels achieved and our PGA Professionals' efforts will be rewarded in career possibilities. For example, PGA Master Professionals pursue the highest level of education a PGA Member can achieve.

This capstone achievement can only be obtained after a decade of membership in the PGA of America. And since the PGA Certified Professional Program's inception, more than 1,600 PGA Professionals have earned over 2,800 certifications combined in their desired career paths. At least five years of PGA Membership is required to become a PGA Certified Professional.

The new PGA Specialist Program allows PGA Members to focus on their specialized career path – *Golf Operations, Teaching & Coaching or Executive Management*. The Specialist Program can only begin after three years of PGA Membership. Combine this focus with the rigorous 800 hours of educational training it takes to become a PGA Member, and it is easy to see why PGA Professionals are the most qualified to advance in the workplace throughout their career.

BOARDROOM: *What are the challenges facing the PGA Professional in the coming years? What has to happen to entice more people, including kids and women, to the game? How has the game changed? ➤*

We are bullish on the game. Golf is on the up-swing and PGA Professionals and the PGA of America have a great deal to do with that growth. We are leading a culture of innovation, so that we are part of – and not a victim to – inevitable disruption. We are excited about the new PGA.com and the possibilities it brings to our PGA Professionals in the digital landscape, as well as our outreach to consumers.

We're also excited about youth participation, as our PGA Jr. League Golf enrollment has grown 67 percent in just the last three years alone. And I'd like to think we're just getting started, as the growth in junior golf looks extremely promising. Girls' golf is on the rise, accounting for 36 percent of the 2.5 million youth golfers. Meanwhile, the number of girls playing competitive golf grew by more than 288,000 over the past decade.

We recently acquired Nextgen Golf, a company whose reach is vast among high schools and colleges across the United States, and they also offer solutions for us to fill in the gaps for what's next in the 20- to 30-year old market. As we reach out to all age groups and demographics, our PGA Professionals work extremely hard to provide the best experience possible, for as long as possible.

For us, great opportunities lie in the growth of golf and in the inherent qualities the game provides, including health and wellness, family engagement, business networking, competing and new player programming, to name a few.



PHOTO ABOVE: PGA PRESIDENT SUZY WHALEY, PGA PRESIDES OVER THE PGA ANNUAL MEETING AND THE PGA OF AMERICA'S NEARLY 29,000 PGA PROFESSIONALS.

TOP PHOTO LEFT SIDE: WHALEY GREETES ONE OF 60,000 PGA JR. LEAGUE GOLFERS, A RECORD TOTAL IN 2019.

BOTTOM PHOTO LEFT SIDE: A PGA MASTER PROFESSIONAL, WHALEY WAS NAMED AS ONE OF THE "TOP 100 TEACHERS IN AMERICA" BY GOLF MAGAZINE FOR 2019-2020

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF PGA OF AMERICA

Currently, fewer than one woman for every four men plays the game and this presents room for growth. Teaching the game to individuals from diverse backgrounds will make our facilities look more like the communities we live in but will also provide a great source of revenue and growth of the game for PGA Professionals. That's why diversity, inclusion, women's golf, Baby Boomers and youth play are all passions of mine. They all lead to more golfers.

BOARDROOM: *Based on these factors, what do you see as the role of the PGA Professional, including 1) Club professionals, director of golf and teaching professionals, and 2) as club executives and senior managers of clubs, particularly private clubs, over the next decade?*

PGA Professionals impact the business of the game every day with the membership and customers they serve. As Executive Managers, Directors of Golf, Directors of Instruction and many other career leadership positions, PGA Professionals are skilled to deliver in coaching, operations, food and beverage, and all facets of a club's operation.

Yet, what differentiates a PGA Professional is their level of skill on the course and their acumen to enhance the golf experience at the facility, to provide great revenues across all lines of business at any club. With more play comes more engagement and more spending. PGA Professionals that oversee the entire process have a clear understanding of course activation, as well as the value of hiring other qualified PGA Professionals for golf operations and on the lesson tee.

BOARDROOM: *What can private clubs do to help with the challenges the PGA Professionals face?*

We are all in this together, so it makes great sense for private clubs to work directly with PGA Professionals to overcome challenges that we may face. A challenge brings opportunity—to grow and enhance your business; to discover new pathways for revenues and profits; to reallocate resources; to launch new programs at your facility, such as PGA Jr. League, and more. Through collaboration, we can work together to identify areas of opportunity. It's a win-win situation for both the private club and the PGA Professional. The end result could pay dividends for years to come. **BR**

