



Cathy Harbin

INFLUENTIAL WOMEN in GOLF

We honor 10 women who are paving the way for others.

BY MICHELLE WEYENBERG

Golf was long accused of being a good ol' boys club. Men in the business supported other men through friendships and social connections.

Case in point: The PGA Show, which brings together 30,000 industry members, often felt like it was 90% men, 5% female show models and 5% female attendees.

But the industry has been changing. More women are taking on key roles and passing it forward to other women. The changes have led to an increasing number of female golfers, along with many other positives.

Last year, Golf Inc. magazine honored the late Hilda Allen, a long-time broker

who made a name for herself in the male dominated profession through hard work and compassion.

Allen was a vanguard, leading women into the business of golf and tirelessly supporting their careers. It was only fitting to name an award after her.

This year, we present The Hilda Allen Award to 10 women who are leaders in helping women prosper and grow in the golf industry. As Allen did, they combine business savvy with hard work.

"When you combine skill with compassion, you have a super-power," said Susan Dunnavant, co-founder and COO at Concert Golf Partners, and one of this year's

honorees.

From golf course owners and operators to CEOs, COOs and vice presidents, as well as architects, merchandisers and founders of programs, these 10 women are actively contributing to the golf industry as a whole, as well as helping women in golf excel.

CATHY HARBIN

PGA Master Professional; owner of Pine Ridge Golf Course; PGA of America director at large; secretary, NCGOA

Cathy Harbin has had four dream jobs since she started working in the golf industry after college.

First, she was general manager of World Golf Village in St. Augustine, Florida, for 12 years. Then, as the executive director of Golf 20/20 for three years, she was involved with several national committees. During her four-year tenure with industry leader ClubCorp (now Invited), Harbin oversaw golf revenue, programming, experiences and public golf.

She also has a strong relationship with the PGA of America and helped launch its Get Golf Ready program in 2009.

Currently, she's the owner of Pine Ridge Golf Course in Paris, Texas, which she purchased in 2017.

"I always want to introduce people to the game in a non-intimating fashion," she said. "To take away the barriers and intimidation of the game."

So much about golf is appealing to women, Harbin added.

"It's not just about the social time with friends," she said. "They like to play golf, be outside, get exercise and fresh air. Somewhere along the way, we finally figured out we had to offer alternative ways to play the game. We needed to mold into their lifestyles."

So much is happening at a grassroots level, she said, including events like Women's Golf Day, which she's hosted at Pine Ridge.

"It's a whole new generation of acceptance and enlightenment of equality," said

Harbin, who was named as one of the most admired golf course operators by Golf Inc. magazine in 2006. "We just have to create an environment where women feel like they belong and are welcome. The more we create that environment, the more we will see those numbers grow."

SUSAN DUNNAVANT

co-founder and COO at Concert Golf Partners

Susan Dunnavant's passion for the golf industry, coupled with her relentless dedication to excellence, has made her a respected figure in the field.

In 2011, she co-founded Concert Golf Partners with CEO Peter Nanula.

"Her visionary leadership and strategic thinking have been instrumental in establishing Concert Golf Partners as a prominent player in the industry," Nanula said.

Prior to Concert Golf, Dunnavant spent eight years as director of operations at Arnold Palmer Golf Management, where Nanula was the CEO. Then, for more than a decade, she was president of Magellan Golf, overseeing management and development of numerous golf courses and country clubs.

"I have had many good achievements that I am proud of, but I think that my



Sandy Cross

most recent, the founding of Concert Golf from startup to a \$600-million-plus company, is definitely up there," she said. "Additionally, building a loyal and diverse team of entrepreneurial leaders is the icing on the cake."

Dunnavant said there are more opportunities than there used to be for women in the industry, but there is still a long way to go.

"For businesses to prosper, leaders need to look at the industry differently and try new things," she said. "The club industry needs to change with new and different market demands."

SANDY CROSS

chief people officer, PGA of America
Sandy Cross has been a staff member of PGA of America since 1996, when she stumbled into a 90-day temp job after college. In her first role, she was the PGA's director of business development, where she secured and cultivated some of the organization's most coveted longstanding partnerships, including those with National Car Rental and PepsiCo.

She then became director of women's and new market initiatives, where she led the groundbreaking Connecting With Her campaign to attract and retain women in the sport.

From 2014 to 2018, Cross was senior director of inclusion and diversity. She launched the inclusion department and laid out its strategic plan.

Now, as chief people officer, she has been



Susan Dunnavant



Jan Bel Jan

instrumental in launching and sustaining the golf industry's Make Golf Your Thing movement and PGA of America programs such as JobMatch, VendorMatch and Beyond the Green to present career and business opportunities to individuals and companies from under-represented backgrounds, while also promoting interest and inclusion in the game of golf.

"It's been a really interesting evolution to be so steep in the industry and to move around the business and to see it on all sides," Cross said. "The world is your oyster. I think oftentimes there's a perception that it's going to be an uphill battle in the golf industry. I found more so that the opportunities are endless, and I've been embraced more often than not."

JAN BEL JAN

architect, Jan Bel Jan Golf Course Design; past president of ASGCA. It's construction time in Florida. Jan Bel Jan has been driving more than 20 hours a week among her projects and spending 8 to 10 hours a day on job sites.

Her dedication to growing the game and making all parts of golf more accessible to women and girls is second to none. Coming from a family of golf professionals, she began her design career with Tom Fazio, with whom she worked for more

than 20 years. In 2009, she formed her own design firm.

She's been an active member of the American Society of Golf Course Architects since 1990 and served as president in 2019-20. She currently represents the ASGCA on the board of the National Alliance for Accessible Golf.

Her experience as a registered landscape architect, certified arborist and former assistant superintendent provides her with expertise in the playability, strategy, ecology, economics and aesthetics of golf courses.

Her development of scoring tees in golf course architecture was a forerunner to the forward tee designs becoming popular today.

Among her current projects is a course renovation for the city of Miami Springs, Florida, which is celebrating its centennial year.

"Parameters from the city made this a modest renovation, but my design work has been to make the course more fun for women and families, as well as challenge the more skilled golfers," she said.

JENNIFER MORTON

CEO of Association of Golf Merchandisers

Jennifer Morton has a long history in the golf industry. She was director of marketing and sales for the Association of Golf Merchandisers before they appointed her CEO in May.

Prior to AGM, Morton worked at the Haggin Oaks Golf Complex in Sacramento, California, as a buyer, merchandiser, e-commerce specialist, retail consultant, international speaker and marketer. And yes, she is married to Ken Morton Jr. of Morton Golf Management.

Like her husband, she is an AGM certified retail merchandiser, and she's been an AGM member for more than 20 years.

Fifty percent of AGM members are women. One of Morton's goals as CEO is to continue to include female players in the golf retail space.

"More and more brands are doing more



Jennifer Morton

to recognize the women golfer," she said. "Even just having equipment women can demo or get fit for. And brands are recognizing that not all women want things that are pink or purple."

So many merchandisers at golf facilities are now women, Morton said, and she thinks that helps bring in female golfers.

"We really are at a point in time where golf really did benefit from the pandemic and there is tremendous opportunity in this field as we branch forward," she said. "Opportunities for women are greater now than ever in the past, and I absolutely see and believe that it's going to continue to snowball."

ALLISON GEORGE

owner of Toad Valley Golf Course
For Allison George, the best sound in



Allison George

the world is hearing people laugh at Toad Valley Golf Course's miniature golf course.

"I'm a huge believer that golf is supposed to be fun," said George, owner of her family's golf course in Des Moines, Iowa. "I think the thing I love the most about golf is that we sell memories. We are providing this vehicle for family bonding."

Having been involved in the business since she was 2, she's done most every job at the course. After taking over her family's business in 2004, she had an uphill battle to bring back the club and tackle marketing in a highly competitive market. She has introduced many programs designed to bring new golfers to the game, increase play by women and juniors, and fill the tee sheet.

"The golf course allows me to try new things," she said. "Some of it works, and some of it doesn't."

Celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, the course is set to open a Toptracer facility this fall with 10 heated bays.

George is also training her daughter to take over.

Though there were times when George was the only woman in a room at a golf conference, she said her daughter has not had to be in that position.

"My experience was definitely different than it is for my daughter," George said. "They don't question the fact that a woman is in charge like they did 20 years ago. I was blessed with amazing parents. My parents made sure that my voice was important."

George has served on the board of the NGCOA since 2013, and Golf Inc. magazine named her one of the most innovative people in golf in 2015.

DONNA HOFFMAN

founder & president of Women on Course

Donna Hoffman is an entrepreneur with an extensive film and video career. In June 2005, she did a television show called "Women on Course." People started asking, "Can we join Women on Course?"



Donna Hoffman

"I had no intention of making it a membership," Hoffman said. "Women like to join things. It started as a Happy Hour 19th Hole program."

Then they started asked about events.

As a member of ClubCorp at the time, she started doing golf events, creating opportunities for people whether they had ever touched a club or not.

"When I started playing golf, I didn't

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Elisa Gaudet

know I was breaking all these rules," she said. "No one wants to be in that position. I just love preparing women to succeed, and they love that we care about them. It's a very supportive environment."

After a few partnerships for Women on Course, including one with Billy Casper Golf, she relaunched the program herself in 2016.

"Golf is where the deals are made, but nobody is teaching you how to get there and feel comfortable," Hoffman said. "What we've done is say there are other ways to play the game. By taking away that myth of having to be good, we have seen a huge increase in people joining."

She is currently working with more than 350 golf courses nationwide to develop women's programs.

ELISA GAUDET

founder, Women's Golf Day

Before Women's Golf Day became what it is today — a global movement involving more than 1,000 locations in 80 countries — it was just a side project for Elisa Gaudet. She founded the annual event in 2016.

"I studied and absorbed what people

were saying, [that] golf is too long, too intimidating," she said. "I wanted to mix new and existing golfers to help get them comfortable."

This inspired her to create a global event that unites women around the world through golf and encourages opportunities to introduce new players to golf while celebrating existing players.

Women's Golf Day began as a four-hour event for women and girls held on the first Tuesday in June. It now has official events spanning an entire week from the last Tuesday in May to the first Tuesday in June. Female golfers and non-golfers play golf at hosted locations around the world.

Before founding Women's Golf Day, Gaudet founded Executive Golf International, a strategy-driven golf marketing firm. She has appeared on numerous radio and TV programs to share her golf knowledge and has hosted golf programming. She has also spoken at numerous international sports and business conferences, including the International Sports Conference, The PGA Show and Golf Inc. conferences.

AMANDA NORVELL

vice president of direct-to-consumer products & services for Fandango & NBC Sports Next · NBCUniversal

For as long as she can remember, Amanda



Amanda Norvell

Norvell wanted to work in sports.

"I think the world is a better place because of sports, because of the values that sports teach and espouse," she said.

While she didn't grow up playing golf, she grew up around it. Her uncle competed on the PGA Tour, and her brother has been in the golf business.

When Golf Channel and GolfNow recruited her in 2012, she jumped at the opportunity. She has spent the past 11 years at the forefront of several key projects, including the launch of GolfPass with Rory McIlroy in 2019.

"I'll never forget being at the office late into the evening with our small team, watching Rory live on Jimmy Fallon announcing the brand, while simultaneously watching the site metrics to make sure nothing went wrong," said Norvell, who continues to oversee and grow the membership service.

Key moments for her include establishing a long-term partnership with Youth on Course and spearheading development of GolfNow's round-up campaign, where those booking tee times can choose to round their total charges up to the nearest dollar figure and donate the added amount to charity.

She has also served as an adviser and mentor for the Comcast NBCUniversal SportsTech Accelerator, which helps sports tech startups design their business models and strategies.

"I would love to see more collaboration and cooperation among golf's biggest entities that focuses efforts on growing the game of golf, making it more approachable and accessible, and supporting the next generation of everyday golfers," Norvell said.

NICHOLE INKEL

LPGA Professional; owner, Windy Hill Golf Course and Sports Complex

Nichole Inkel aspired to be a touring pro golfer, but a bad car accident on the way to a tournament when she was 22 took her down a different path. After 10 years of rehabilitation, she became a golf coach and



Nichole Inkel

Class A LPGA teaching professional.

Originally from Springfield, Illinois, she taught at several golf courses throughout the city and was the NCAA head women's golf coach at University of Illinois Springfield for six years.

Before taking ownership of Windy Hill Golf Course and Sports Complex in Midlothian, Virginia, in 2021, she was an LPGA teaching professional at Desert Mountain in Scottsdale, Arizona.

She has also been the director of junior golf, the director of LPGA-USGA Girls Golf and the lead teaching professional at Anthem Country Club in Anthem, Arizona.

"I never really had any intention to buy a golf course," Inkel said. "When I was in Arizona, I was a player, member and employee. It's very interesting for me to have that perspective."

When she took over Windy Hill, she felt she had to prove herself — mostly to prove that she was a golfer, she said. But she was quick to note that she has had the support of so many people, including superintendents.

"I'm making sure I'm out there playing," Inkel said. "I think that makes a difference in why this place has grown so much. You're going to retain women when they don't feel intimidated and they feel welcome."

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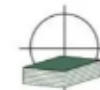
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