

## **Ferncroft CC Member Donna Caponi-Byrnes Receives PGA First Lady of Golf Award**

Donna Caponi-Byrnes, the daughter of a PGA Professional who became a four-time major champion and later capped her Hall of Fame career as one of today's more popular television golf reporters, is the recipient of the 2009 PGA First Lady of Golf Award.

Honored on Jan. 28, 2010 at The PGA of America Awards program in Orlando, Fla., Caponi-Byrnes extended her career as one of the most recognizable roving reporters in tournament golf on the Golf Channel.

Caponi-Byrnes, 64, who turned professional in 1965, made the 1969 U.S. Women's Open at Scenic Hills Country Club in Pensacola, Fla., her first professional victory. She went on to win 24 championships from 1969 through 1981 on the LPGA Tour, following her '69 major triumph with a wire-to-wire victory in the 1970 U.S. Women's Open at Muskogee (Okla.) Country Club, and capturing the 1979 and 1981 LPGA Championships. She also won the 1979 Peter Jackson Classic (now du Maurier Classic) and 1980 Colgate Dinah Shore Winner's Circle (now Kraft Nabisco Championship) before the two were designated major championships in 1979 and 1983, respectively.

Caponi-Byrnes capped her career by winning five times in each of her final two seasons, a surge that elevated her to be inducted in 2001 into the World Golf Hall of Fame.

"Donna Caponi-Byrnes first left an impact upon the game by her talent and success in a Hall of Fame career, then followed by giving millions of viewers one of the most insightful and entertaining perspectives for what it means for today's professional to perform inside the ropes," said PGA of America President Jim Remy. "Donna has always been a tremendous friend to the PGA Professional, displaying through her work an understanding of the demands of the profession and how PGA Professionals are vital to the growth of the game. The PGA of America is extremely proud to present Donna with The PGA First Lady of Golf Award."

Among Caponi-Byrnes' many endeavors is serving as a longtime supporter of the Rally for the Cure, a grassroots program launched in 1996 in partnership with Susan G. Komen for the Cure, dedicated to spreading awareness in the fight to eradicate breast cancer - the disease that claimed the life of Caponi-Byrnes' mother, Antoinette.

Since 1995, Caponi-Byrnes has been a member of Golf Channel's tournament broadcasting staff, and is perhaps best known for her insightful on-course interviews with many of the game's premier players.

"I was shocked to have learned that I had won this award, having known that it puts one in a category that includes such individuals as a Barbara Nicklaus," said Caponi-Byrnes. "I have been a great admirer of Barbara and I remember being at an event where Jack was playing when we heard that Barbara won the first award (1998). It makes me feel pretty humbled."

"I have been blessed with a great career and reached the Hall of Fame, but I honestly believe that had my Dad - a 24-year member of The PGA - lived to see this, he would have been even happier to see his oldest daughter receiving this award from The PGA of America. Through my father, I knew well what the career commitment of being a PGA Professional is all about. I have a soft spot in my heart for the club professional and I am deeply honored."

Inspired at age 3 to learn the game of golf from her father, the late PGA Professional Harry Caponi, Donna was a quick study. She won the 1956 Los Angeles Junior Championship, playing with cut-down men's clubs. A year later, at age 12, she received her first complete set of golf clubs. She went on to finish 21st as an amateur in the 1964 Hillside House Ladies Open on the LPGA Tour. She turned professional the following year.

It would be another four years until Caponi-Byrnes made her breakthrough in the national spotlight, rallying from five strokes back with a closing 69 to win the 1969 U.S. Women's Open, but not before final-hole dramatics.

After she had found the fairway with her drive on the 18th hole, an electrical storm pushed through the Pensacola area including Scenic Hills Country Club, suspending play for more than 15 minutes. Caponi-Byrnes returned to hit her approach to within four feet of the hole. As she was standing over her putt, she heard the late legendary Byron Nelson describing the break of the putt from his broadcaster's perch. He said that the putt broke slightly to the left.

Caponi-Byrnes backed off and read the putt again, deciding to trust her own read. She made the putt for a one-stroke victory over Peggy Wilson. She later learned that Nelson had been looking at the putt from a camera angle on the opposite side. Both golfers were right in their observation that day.

The following year, Caponi became the second player in history (Mickey Wright was first) to win consecutive Open Championships, this time edging Sandra Spuzich by a stroke. Her winning score of 287 tied Wright's then-72-hole Open record.

"My Dad was able to see me win four Tour events, including that first U.S. Open," said Caponi-Byrnes, whose father, a former PGA teaching professional at DeBell Golf Course in Burbank, Calif., passed away at age 49 in 1972 after suffering an aneurysm. "My mother, who had helped my father in the golf shop on weekends, saw me play through most of my career."

Following the passing of her father, Caponi-Byrnes received coaching and counsel on her game from her younger sister, Janet [LePera], who played on the LPGA Tour before developing a successful teaching career.

Today, LePera is ranked by Golf Digest as one of the country's top 50 women teaching professionals. Caponi-Byrnes also honed her putting from one of the game's putting

masters - two-time PGA Champion Dave Stockton, whom she had met in the Los Angeles area earlier in her career.

Caponi-Byrnes also has a younger sister, Tina Marie of Orlando, Fla., who was 10 years old when her mother, Antoinette Caponi, died in 1981. Tina Marie was raised by her sister, Janet.

"I was born of parents who helped us develop our dreams," said Caponi-Byrnes. "I remember my mother driving us to the course, then sitting and crocheting in the car while we were playing junior golf. I turned professional at age 19, and at the time there was no women's college golf. I knew then that it was time to see if my athletic ability and love of the game could become a career."

When she retired from full-time competition in 1988, Caponi searched for another avenue to remain close to the game. She found the television broadcasting, and worked for ESPN, CBS, NBC and Turner Sports to build her skills before joining Golf Channel.

"I have always worked to ask a player questions I would want to be asked," said Caponi-Byrnes. "I believed that the audience already knows a lot about players and wants to hear something that they don't know."

"I enjoy my job and I believe that what I do now in my career is what a player does in preparing for competition. It's a process, a filing system. Every practice round you learn something, and in my work, I also believe that you learn and you file it away."

Caponi-Byrnes was named the Golf Writers Association of America Female Player of the Year in 1981. She served as assistant captain of the 2005 U.S. Solheim Cup Team, and in July 2006, married her longtime boyfriend, Edward "Ted" Byrnes.

The PGA First Lady of Golf Award, inaugurated in 1998, is presented to a woman who has made significant contributions to the promotion of the game of golf.

#### PGA First Lady of Golf Recipients

1998 Barbara Nicklaus

1999 Judy Rankin

2000 No recipient

2001 Judy Bell

2002 Nancy Lopez

2003 Renee Powell

2004 Alice Dye

2005 Carol Semple Thompson

2006 Kathy Whitworth

2007 Peggy Kirk Bell

2008 Carol Mann

2009 Donna Caponi-Byrnes

## About The PGA of America

Since 1916, The PGA of America's mission has been twofold: to establish and elevate the standards of the profession and to grow interest and participation in the game of golf. By establishing and elevating the standards of the golf profession through world-class education, career services, marketing and research programs, the Association enables PGA Professionals to maximize their performance in their respective career paths and showcases them as experts in the game and in the multi-billion dollar golf industry. By creating and delivering dramatic world-class championships and exciting and enjoyable golf promotions that are viewed as the best of their class in the golf industry, The PGA of America elevates the public's interest in the game, the desire to play more golf, and ensures accessibility to the game for everyone, everywhere. The PGA of America brand represents the very best in golf.