

A photograph of Joe Cantwell, an older man with grey hair and glasses, wearing a tan blazer over a dark sweater. He is standing outdoors with green foliage in the background.

*This year's MGA
Distinguished
Service Award goes
to Joe Cantwell, a
man with a
reputation
for getting
things done*

Can-Do Cantwell

BY GREG MIDLAND

A recent edition of Webster's Dictionary defines volunteer as *one who enters into or offers himself for a service of his own free will*. It's an apt description, but is missing one thing: a cross-reference that reads *see Cantwell, Joseph C.*

Joe Cantwell, the recipient of the 2006 MGA Distinguished Service Award, has for the past 25 years devoted the better part of his time and energy furthering the goals of the MGA. "I had the time, I had the information, I loved the game and I wanted to give back," he said. To anyone associated with the MGA who has seen Joe's enthusiasm and dedication, that would qualify as the understatement of the year.

Through his work on the Tournament, Handicapping & Course Rating and Executive Committees, Joe has drawn on his life and business experiences to find innovative ways to improve the MGA. He was a major figure in the financial negotiations that made Golf Central, the home office for the MGA and several other local associations, a reality. He was elected as MGA President in 1998, and in his two-year term he initiated a complete organizational review, bringing in a consultant to analyze which services and programs the MGA should expand or create to reach more golfers. Those efforts help lay the groundwork for the growth of the MGA Foundation and the current Capital Campaign.

In addition to his administrative work on behalf of the MGA, Joe was passionate about the Rules of Golf, and maintained a full schedule as an official at local and national championships. "My wife got used to hearing the alarm clock go off before dawn," he says with a laugh. It is those experiences as a Rules official that

have given Joe some entertaining stories.

"One year I was working at Rockaway Hunting Club for a Senior Open qualifier. Larry Laoretti hit a ball through the fairway and was blocked out by a tree. He found some new sod near his ball and asked me, 'Do I get ground under repair relief from this?' I looked at it and replied that he didn't, so he went ahead and played his shot. After he hit he said to me, 'If Jack Nicklaus had asked for relief, would you have given it?' And I replied, 'Jack would never have asked.'"

Born in Brooklyn, Joe learned the game in the early 1940s and first started playing public courses around New York City. He began a successful career in finance, and rose to become president of Bankers Trust. In 1978 Joe and his wife, Pat, joined Hempstead Golf & Country Club on Long Island, and it was there that fellow member Jimmy Smith introduced him to the MGA. Joe saw an opportunity to become even more involved with the game, and he later forged a bond with Dr. Richard Silver – the 1982 MGA DSA recipient and former MGA Tournament Chairman. Dr. Silver brought Joe to the attention of USGA officials, who enlisted his service on various committees, many of which he still serves on today.

Upon being told he was the recipient of the DSA, Joe was overjoyed. "I've been so closely attached to the MGA for so many years now; I can't tell you how delighted I was." It is a fact that the contributions of volunteers form the core of amateur golf at all levels. Joe Cantwell has made numerous contributions, and his record of achievement puts him among the most accomplished volunteers the MGA has ever known. ■