

Parks Pride

For his extraordinary efforts on behalf of public golfers everywhere, David Catalano is the MGA's 2011 Distinguished Service Award recipient

BY BILLY CONDON

PHOTO BY JOHN MUMMERT

When David Catalano first started working at Bethpage State Park in the summer of 1967, he was picking up litter and cleaning bathrooms. By 2002, he had helped orchestrate one of the most successful U.S. Opens in history at the facility's Black Course, which under Catalano underwent a transformation from ragged to regal in the space of just a few years. Now, at the sunset of his remarkable career, Catalano will receive the MGA's highest honor, the Distinguished Service Award.

Catalano's work changed the way that golf's governing bodies, media, and players thought about public golf. In turn, Bethpage became the symbol of a premier championship golf experience open to all. As golfers from across the country and around the world arrived in droves to the 90-hole Long Island golf mecca, they were all the more willing to stand in line or spend the night in their cars for their chance to play the Black, the course that captivated TV audiences and the most enthusiastic gallery in U.S. Open history.

Catalano, 64, began working at Bethpage full-time in 1973 as a member of the maintenance staff, and in 1976 was named superintendent of the

Green Course. He left Bethpage in 1978 and, following a series of promotions, rose to Director of Operations of the Long Island region in 1991. He returned to Bethpage as Director in 1995, less than a year before the USGA announced that Bethpage would be awarded the 2002 U.S. Open.

"One of the best decisions I made was to reassign Dave to Bethpage," said former New York State Parks commissioner Bernadette Castro. "There needed to be a talented, experienced state parks professional on-site, and he was the operational genius behind the U.S. Opens."

Catalano also did some savvy hiring of his own. When 26-year-old Craig Currier interviewed for the job as Bethpage's head superintendent in 1997, it was Catalano who offered the young man the position, knowing the priority would be preparing the Black for the Open. Catalano entrusted Currier with the on-course operations, while Catalano handled the countless logistical and business affairs involving private vendors, the USGA, and others. The tandem exceeded expectations, resulting in one of the most successful U.S. Opens in history. Shortly afterward, Bethpage was awarded another Open in 2009.



Catalano was ever-present during the two U.S. Opens at Bethpage, and garnered tremendous respect from players.

"He was the backbone of the entire operation [at Bethpage]," Currier, now the superintendent at the Glen Oaks Club, says of his mentor and former boss. "If you could dream up the perfect 13-year working relationship, that was it. What Dave has done for public golf may never be repeated."

Catalano's devotion to public golf

extends to the local level. The MGA, Met PGA and LIGA have held many championships at the facility, and he takes pride in sharing the story of Bethpage to a new generation. He enthusiastically serves as a speaker at junior events and clinics and talks to young people about Bethpage's history as a Works Progress Administration project and its continued recreational importance.

Outside of his duties at Bethpage, Catalano has a strong philanthropic side. He was instrumental in setting up the Michael Lawton Environmental Scholarship and recently established the Dave Catalano/Craig Currier Scholarship, set to be awarded for the first time in 2012. Catalano also works closely with the Eastern Amputee Golf Association, hosting their National and Regional championships at Bethpage, and speaks regularly to local groups including the Girl Scouts, Rotary Club and historical societies.

In an age when golf is working hard to become a more accessible game, Dave Catalano has done more to elevate the image of public golf than any other individual. He has given more than 40 years of his life to the New York State Parks Department, making sure that one of its crown jewels continues to sparkle for all visitors. ■

There is something for **EVERYONE** at Club Wycliffe

Best Social Calendar in the Palm Beaches | 36 Holes of Private Golf | 16 Har-Tru Tennis Courts
Great Dining Restaurants | Fitness Programs | Spa | Pools | Social Events

Please Contact: **Risë V. Siegrist** 561.889.6873 www.RiseAtWycliffe.com