

# LIVE

# WIRE

Giving back to the game came naturally to our Distinguished Service Award winner, and he got back even more in return

**BY JEANNE McCOOEY**

Let's get these out of the way up front: Former MGA President Don Hendler is one of the bright lights of our golf community. He's a man with connections who knows how to flip the switch and turn on the energy when it's needed most, an electric presence on the MGA scene.

He is also the MGA's 2014 Distinguished Service Award winner, in recognition of his twenty-five years as one of the Met area's most respected and influential leaders.

Despite his responsibilities as President and CEO of Leviton—one of the world's leading manufacturers of electrical devices, lighting, and electronic connectors—Hendler has contributed to the good of the game on many levels: officiating at tournaments, developing fundraising campaigns, presiding over meetings, and strategic planning for the many associations on whose boards he serves. The MGA is proud to recognize his long service to the Association, the LIGA, the Long Island Caddie Scholarship Fund, and the Met golf community as a whole by giving him its highest honor.

Hendler was born in Niagara Falls, N.Y., and grew up



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in Rockville Centre. A typical Long Island kid, he lived for sports—soccer, track, biking, skiing, even the javelin. He started in golf at an early age; his parents were members of Cold Spring CC, and he was competing in junior events before his teenage years. His high school (Southside) had no golf team, but he maintained a good enough game to make the squad at Franklin & Marshall College. He worked his way up to #1 man and captain by his senior year, and graduated in 1967 with a degree in history.

After graduation he joined the New York Air National Guard. “My parents instilled in me early on a responsibility to give something back: to country, community, club or whatever; there are no free rides. I have to say it was the best advice I ever got. The rewards of giving back have come back to me tenfold every time.”

During his Guard training, Hendler met fellow Long Islander John Baldwin, an outstanding player who would eventually win two Met Amateurs, back-to-back MGA Player of the Year titles, and serve as MGA President. The two young men discovered they shared a commitment to service and to golf, and through Baldwin’s close friendship with LIGA and MGA President George Sands, Hendler became active in those organizations as well as the Long Island Caddie Scholarship Fund, which Sands had established in 1962.

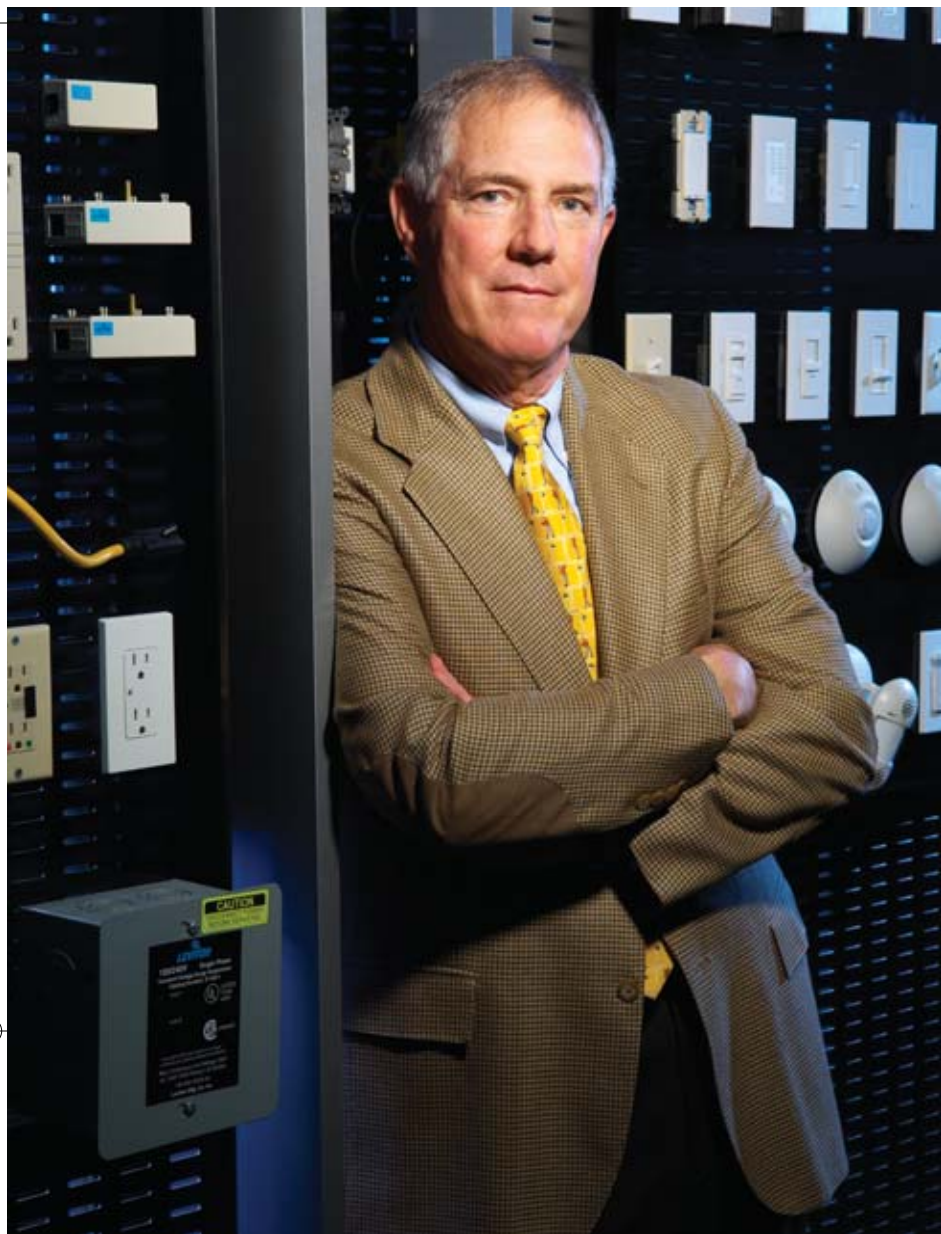
Hendler completed his Guard service and in 1968 married his college sweetheart, Adele Leviton. He worked his way up in his father-in-law’s com-

pany, with positions in sales, marketing, and product development before becoming Vice President of Strategic Planning in 1994. Under his direction the company grew into one of North America’s largest manufacturers and suppliers of electronic wiring devices and expanded into the commercial voice and data sectors and into structured cabling markets. (Sound dull? Just look around your house—check the lights, the lamps, the computers and the phone—and you will no doubt find at least one Leviton product, probably several.) Hendler also spearheaded the company’s global expansion and became President in 2005.

The Hendlers belonged to several clubs on Long Island before joining Meadow Brook Club, which is conveniently adjacent to his backyard, in 2000. Along the way he worked with professionals like Nunzio Ciampi at Glen Head Country Club to keep his game in shape and maintain a scratch handicap. At 69, he hasn’t strayed far from the number, still playing to a 4.5 Index. His competitiveness made him a serious contender in many Met Area events, and over the years he has racked up some impressive finishes in tournaments like the Anderson Memorial, Wilson Cup, and Hochster Memorial.

In the 1980s, Hendler started volunteering as an LIGA tournament official, and then was asked to join the LIGA Executive Committee. His involvement with the LI Caddie Scholarship Fund began then as well, and he has been its Vice President for many years. “I discovered that helping





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Don’s reputation caught the attention of the MGA and in 1991 he was invited to serve on the Tournament Committee. His very first assignment from Tournament Director Gene Westmoreland was the Women’s Net Team qualifying event at Nissequogue. “My first ruling involved notifying Gene that two players – who happened to be members of the club - had played from the wrong tees and had to be assessed a two-stroke penalty. I felt just awful. I hoped there wouldn’t be many more days like this.”

Westmoreland remembers that “it was evident from the start that Don was a very bright guy with a lot more to offer.” Within a year he was asked to join the MGA Executive Committee, and his background in strategic planning proved invaluable during a period of enormous growth and change that saw the birth of the MGA Foundation, the move to Golf Central, the MGA’s Centennial, and the launch of a major capital campaign.

Hendler moved through the officer ranks and became President in 2005, as the capital campaign was just beginning its important club phase. Typically, he saw this not as a daunting assignment but as an opportunity to increase MGA awareness in the golf community. “It was amazing to me that most club members had no idea of the breadth and scope of services that the MGA performs on behalf of golf and golf clubs,” Hendler says. “I really feel that we made great progress in establishing a better link with our clubs throughout the campaign, and created a better understanding that all of us have to contribute something back to the game to ensure its future.” Through his tireless efforts and his leadership during that time, the MGA was able to make great strides towards its \$5 million goal, which it ultimately achieved.

Hendler’s years as President and on the Board of the Foundation also saw a great expansion of The First Tee of Metropolitan New York and GOLFWORKS, two of the MGA Foundation’s flagship programs. And one of his favorite moments came in June of 2006, when he was one of the walking officials with Michelle Wie during the U.S. Open Sectional Qualifying at Canoe Brook CC, possibly the most widely publicized event in MGA history. The 16-year-old Wie missed qualifying for the Open by five strokes, but the result isn’t what was important to him: “To watch this courageous young girl really put herself and her talent on the line and handle all the pressure as well as she did was very moving and something I will always remember.”

His dual commitments as leader of a global business and as a leading participant in Met Area amateur golf administration have placed enormous demands on his time; nonetheless, Hendler says, “being a part of this game at so many levels has given me so much pleasure and taught me many lessons that have helped me throughout my life.”

“What has always stood out about Don was not just what he did in service to the game,” notes MGA Executive Director Jay Mottola, “but the way he did it – always humble and ready to give back while expecting nothing in return.” One example of his generosity came when Leviton was moving to its new headquarters, and Hendler made sure that dozens of valuable pieces of office furniture were made available to the MGA and the other organizations at Golf Central; they are still in use today.

As those organizations can attest, he is not only a man who will give you the shirt off his back, but also the chair under his seat. Don Hendler’s energy and involvement have never wavered even after leaving many of his official posts. He remains an active and valuable member of many of the MGA’s and LIGA’s Committees today, and a most worthy recipient of MGA’s Distinguished Service Award. ■

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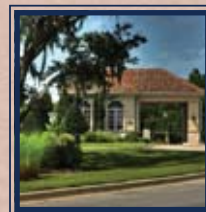


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## EDUCATION

The MGA Foundation’s mission to preserve the game and its values is never more evident than in the wide range of educational opportunities it offers to clubs and their members. These programs provide valuable resources to help ensure the health and well-being of the club industry, help maintain the integrity of the game’s Rules and handicapping principles and add to everyone’s enjoyment of playing the game. Our educational programs include seminars on the Rules, handicapping, course maintenance practices, caddying, public and private club forums, and special programs for MGA Tournament Officials and Club Representatives. They are an integral part of our member services.

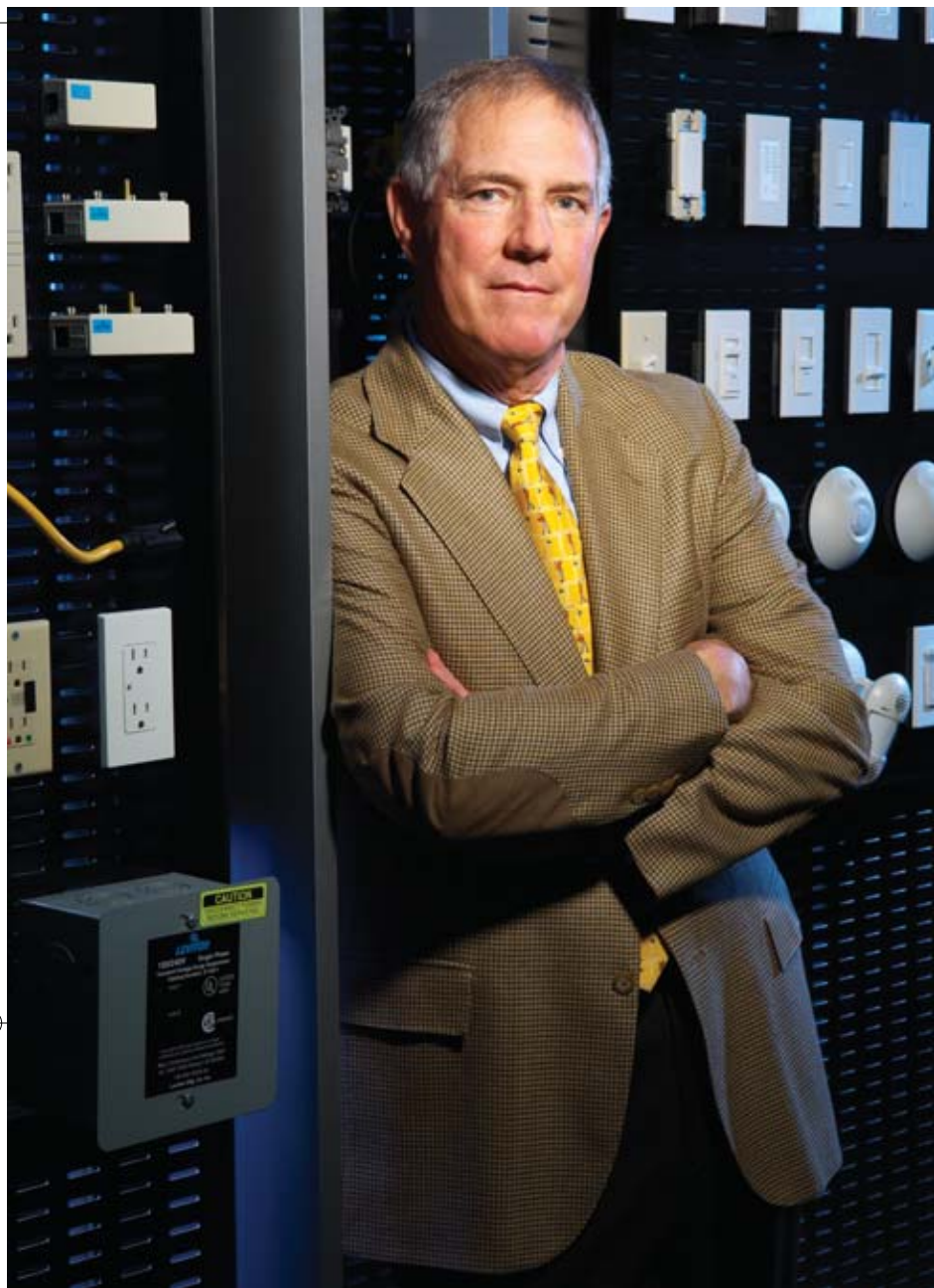
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