

GAME

CHANGER

Jay Mottola is the 2018 recipient of the MGA's Distinguished Service Award

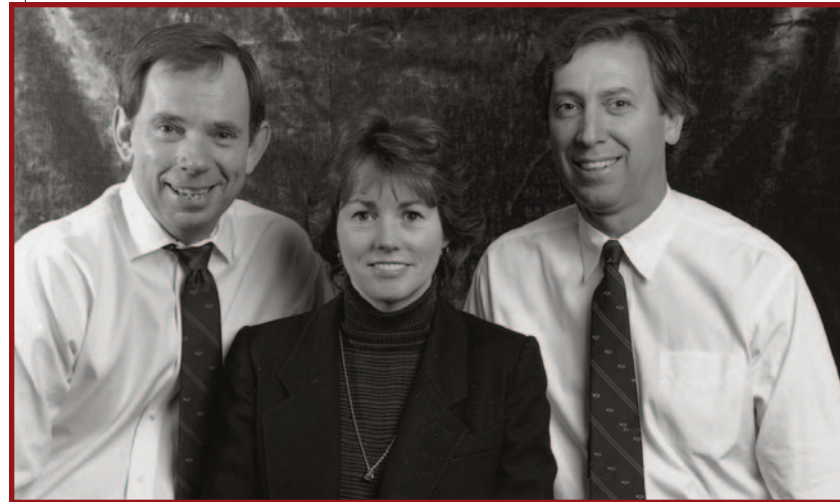
The Distinguished Service Award is the MGA's highest honor. It has been presented since 1973 to a wide array of individuals who have worked tirelessly and with great distinction to serve the best interests of golf and golfers. For most of those forty-five years, Jay Mottola was the Executive Director of the MGA. It is no exaggeration to say he is the single individual most responsible for so much of what the MGA is today—a leader in the golf community, a bastion of integrity and sportsmanship, a source of pride for the Met Area and its clubs. The Met Golfer asked **Gene Westmoreland** and **Jeanne McCooey**, the two people who worked longest alongside Mottola at the MGA, for an appreciation of his influence and his efforts.

JM & GW: Golf is blessed with many outstanding leaders who take their jobs as stewards of the game seriously and capably. But few have demonstrated the kind of leadership, inspiration, and insight to consistently raise the bar for local golf associations in protecting and preserving the game, while still serving the needs of an ever-changing culture, the way Jay did. From nearly his first day on the job in 1980 it was clear that he would bring a different kind of management style and vision to the MGA. With an exhaustive work ethic and uncanny foresight about the growth potential in all areas of MGA operations, he immediately set his sights on putting the MGA on a solid financial footing that would allow it to develop innovative programs and services, expanding its reach into the golf community and establishing

its position as an industry leader.

At the heart of these achievements was clearly a brilliant mind, but also a genuine ability to build and nurture personal relationships—with club and business leaders, players, and golf industry colleagues including club managers, golf professionals, and superintendents. His instinctive understanding of the value of these relationships helped lead to innovations like Golf Central, the MGA Foundation, and *The Met Golfer*.

JM: The sheer volume and diversity of projects and programs that were initiated under Jay's direction is mind-blowing and at times was, frankly, overwhelming. Whenever he had a meeting with



Gene Westmoreland, Jeanne McCooley, and Jay Mottola in the early 1990s.

someone, there was a chance that we were about to add another project to our list. But being part of this process was exciting, and seeing the respect and admiration that the MGA was building in the golf community infused us all with a great sense of pride and passion.

So many of the MGA's achievements are attributable to Jay that the list can go on and on, but the highlight reel includes: the re-vamping of the handicapping system and the beginnings of computerized handicapping, the creation of the GHIN service and Slope system, and industry-leading club insurance programs.

He saw ways that the MGA could be a valuable resource and information conduit to its member clubs, so we created education programs for club leadership and worked with club representatives to navigate major club policy issues. He and his wife Patty raised four daughters, and he's always been a vocal supporter of women's involvement in club leadership and all aspects of the game. He not only kept his eye on the MGA's financial stability, but on helping clubs through several financially challenging times. His emphasis on economic sustainability was a key highlight of his leadership, and he believed in diversifying income streams and established corporate partner programs, including our partnership with MetLife,

which is now one of the longest running sponsorships in all sports.

On the event side, Jay and Gene built one of the best and most inclusive championship programs in the country. Jay grew up a public golfer and that is a group that has always been very important to him, so re-establishing our Public Links Championship was a major accomplishment; it's now the oldest active Public Links Championship in the nation. Under Jay's direction we brought the Ike Championship under the MGA banner as the premier stroke-play event for Met Area amateurs, added more events for seniors and women, and by bringing our events to more clubs and courses showcased the full range of great golf in our area. On a similar note, he had a huge role in bringing the U.S. Open to Bethpage, an idea that some people thought was crazy at first.

GW: I joined the MGA team just after Jay did in the late '70s. We were members of the MGA "Field Team," a new MGA initiative and a sort of advance reconnaissance team that would prep courses for MGA championships and USGA qualifying rounds and help coordinate the work of the MGA's most valuable asset—our volunteer corps. Jay was a wonderful player in those days and would qualify for the U.S. Mid-Am, win the Tuxedo Club championship, and compete in events like the Met Am, the Ike, and the Anderson Memorial. Those that have played golf with him have seen how competitive he is, and his competitive nature surely drove him to make the MGA the best it could be. We both got our start in golf as caddies, which surely helped inspire the MGA's continual push to keep caddies a part of our game through our Caddie Academies and publications on caddying. Those initiatives are now part of the MGA Foundation, which he helped to create in 1991. Its programs like GOLFWORKS have impacted thousands of kids, and have greatly expanded the focus of the Association over the last thirty years. He had a major hand in the creation of one of the country's earliest First Tee sites, The First Tee of Metropolitan New York, which has grown into one of the nation's largest and most impactful chapters.

JM & GW: As Executive Director, Jay kept the MGA's overall mission in clear focus at all times. It wasn't just what he did, it was how he did it, and his passion for looking around the next corner went well beyond the walls of Golf Central. Then and now, he had a simple mantra: "Is it good for golf?" If the answer was yes then you had his attention, and he wasn't afraid of pushing traditional boundaries to make new ideas happen that would move the game forward. This drive to always stay ahead of the curve raised his service to golf to a level that will impact the game for generations to come, and makes him a most distinguished recipient of the MGA's highest honor. ■

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