



Unlike Any Other

A tradition of charitable work on behalf of golf in the Met Area and beyond makes **Jim Nantz** this year's Distinguished Service Award winner.

BY JEFF DAY

“Hello, friends.” It’s the trademark salutation of CBS Sports announcer Jim Nantz, and it comes from seemingly everywhere: The Masters, the PGA Championship, the Super Bowl, the NCAA Men’s Final Four. It has been with us seemingly forever. Nantz, who spent much of his childhood in New Jersey, dreaming of a job with CBS, started with the network back in 1985. He has been the sports fan’s good friend for almost three decades—and a good friend to golf all the while.

Nantz now lives in California but spent most of his career in Connecticut. He is a three-time Emmy Award winner and five-time National Sportscaster of the Year, as well as one of only three people to receive media honors from both the Pro Football Hall of Fame and the Basketball Hall of Fame. In addition to hard work and good fortune, Nantz credits golf for teeing up his drive to professional success.

"Golf was a vital part of my life that opened up all kinds of avenues in my professional career," says Nantz, who was introduced to the game by his father, also named Jim. He worked during summers at Battleground Country Club in Manalapan, N.J., before being recruited to play on the golf team at the University of Houston, where he famously roomed with Fred Couples as well as future PGA Tour pro Blaine McCallister. Nantz earned a degree in radio/television in 1981. "Golf really set the course for my life," he says, "and because of it I feel indebted to the game."

Bronx to the country's largest, with seven facilities and 13 satellite sites now in operation throughout the Met Area.

"I've had a lot of involvement with The First Tee and still do," says Nantz, who spoke on behalf of the sport to our country's leaders during The First Tee's Congressional Breakfast in 2011. "I'm very proud to spread the word of golf and try to introduce the sport and all of its wonderful virtues to as many people as I can."

"Jim has assisted and provided overwhelming support for our work and also that of our chapters,



Circle of friends: Nantz's work and play puts him in the company of presidents (George H.W. Bush) kings (Arnold Palmer), and Hall of Famers (Nick Faldo), but he also makes time for charitable efforts with groups such as The First Tee (center) and individuals with important causes like D.J. Gregory (top left). He has also penned a memoir that focuses on his late father.

Nantz, a longtime member at Winged Foot and the Stanwich Club, has used his celebrity status to be a visible advocate for the game in the Met Area and beyond. In 2001, he lent his voice to the MGA Foundation's promotional video, a valuable tool during the MGA's Capital Campaign, which raised \$5,000,000 and helped the MGA Foundation change the lives of thousands of deserving young people. The following year, he acted as master of ceremonies at the groundbreaking for The First Tee of Metropolitan New York at Mosholu Golf Course. In the ensuing years, the local First Tee chapter has grown from that one facility in the

for which we are very grateful," says longtime First Tee CEO Joe Louis Barrow, Jr. "Our ability to positively impact young people is stronger because of people like Jim."

Sean McManus, Chairman, CBS Sports, praises Nantz as the voice of Sports on the "Tiffany Network," with a masterful grasp of storytelling. "Jim has contributed so much to golf throughout his career and truly is committed to promoting and growing the game," McManus says.

Nantz learned much about giving back from President George H. W. Bush, who became a surrogate father, friend and mentor to Nantz while

Nantz's own father was suffering from Alzheimer's.

"He has just been such a guiding light in my life," says Nantz of Bush. "His heart is so big, such a caring individual—his love of people, his kindness to everyone is downright saintly. And of course one of his biggest mission statements as President was trying to encourage and employ the American people to be a point of light, to volunteer, and that no life was complete unless it included service to others."

"More than any other sport, golf has a heartbeat that cares about people," Nantz says.

"Jim is an outstanding broadcaster who knows the game of golf, and he's good at it too, but above all he's a wonderful man and a dear friend," Bush told *The Met Golfer* via email. While Nantz follows the lead of "41," as he calls the former president, he also believes that giving back through golf is simply ingrained in the game's culture.

"More than any other sport, golf has a heartbeat that cares about people," he says. "It's just the basic nature of the game. Etiquette, kindness, playing by the rules and doing good things—golfers are people that care for other people, and it's one of the tenets of the sport to give back."

Nantz has long supported Bush's annual fundraising outing at Cape Arundel Golf Club in Kennebunkport, Maine. He has also been instrumental in helping others with their own causes.

In 2008, with Nantz's assistance, D.J. Gregory was able to achieve his dream. Gregory, who has cerebral palsy, told Nantz that he wanted to walk every round of every PGA Tour event and write a book about the experience. He simply had no idea how to go about it. Nantz, along with PGA Tour Commissioner Tim Finchem, helped secure sponsorship opportunities for Gregory, which led to what Nantz described as "one of the most magical behind-the-scenes stories in PGA Tour history," as Gregory walked each event from the Tournament of Champions to the Tour Championship.

"It was a tremendous accomplishment," says Nantz. "D.J. took his cause, brought great attention to it and raised a lot of money." In 2009, Gregory received the Metropolitan Golf Writers Association Mary Bea Porter Award...and Nantz was there to introduce him. He has been a great supporter of the MGWA and frequent host, guest speaker and award recipient at one of the biggest awards dinners in golf.

"Jim and I have been friends and partners for many years, and he is as genuine a person as you'll find," says MGA President Jeff Holzschuh. "His passion for the game is matched only by his commitment to giving back, and he has been a true

friend to golf in the Metropolitan Area."

Nantz also had a productive nine-year run co-hosting the Three Amigos Golf Tournament in Houston with Couples and McCallister. The tournament's proceeds were divided equally between the University of Houston and a charity near and dear to each of the "Three Amigos." Nantz choose to raise money for Alzheimer's.

"At the time, our dearly beloved coach Dave Williams was suffering from Alzheimer's," Nantz says. "Little did I know that within a couple of years of starting the Three Amigos, my father would be diagnosed with Alzheimer's, and it took on a much larger and deeper meaning."

As Nantz was entering the most satisfying stage of his professional life, he had to watch his father sink ever deeper into the throes of Alzheimer's, to the point where he had no recognition of anything, including his son. Nantz had laid out the blueprints of his father's retirement. Dad would manage his son's busy schedule while tagging along to golf tournaments, NFL stadiums and college basketball arenas. Had it not been for Alzheimer's, the elder Nantz would have seen his son pull off a rare broadcasting trifecta: calling The Masters, Super Bowl and NCAA Men's Final Four in the same calendar year, a feat Nantz first completed in 2007, then again in 2010 and this year.

Those plans would never come to pass, but Nantz was able to tell his father's story through his *New York Times* bestselling memoir, *Always by My Side*, which chronicled his professional career while living life with a parent with Alzheimer's. Nantz's father passed away in 2008, and in January 2011 Nantz teamed up with Houston's Methodist Hospital to create the Nantz National Alzheimer Center (NNAC), which today is on the cutting edge of both Alzheimer's and traumatic brain injury research. While Alzheimer's research and the NNAC has become Nantz's primary charitable cause, he continues to promote and give back to the game introduced to him by his father.

Fred Couples says his old friend has always been that kind of person.

"Jim has always been crazy about golf—and about helping people," Couples says. "I'm sure he'll be thrilled to receive [the DSA] award, but it's not about awards for Jim. It's about helping your organization succeed in whatever way he can."

Nantz is undeniably appreciative of what golf has done for him and proud to be able to help several golf organizations and charities nationwide, all while being the voice of golf. Jim Nantz's contributions to the game, and vigorous advocacy for it, will help ensure that its values are passed on to the next generation, making him most deserving of the MGA's Distinguished Service Award. ■