A Fitting Tribute

The MGA recognizes Gene Westmoreland for his three decades of service to the game

BY GREG MIDLAND

PHOTOGRAPH BY LEONARD KAMSLER

n December 3, a group of more than 250 representatives of the local golf community convened at Westchester Country Club for the 111th Annual Meeting of the Metropolitan Golf Association. This audience was in for a treat, as Gene Westmoreland was formally presented with the MGA's Distinguished Service Award. Rarely has an award's name so aptly matched its recipient.

Westmoreland has led the MGA's tournament department since 1980, most recently as the MGA Senior Director of Rules & Competitions, and is retiring from this full-time post at the end of 2008. With his unparalleled leadership, Westmoreland is the person primarily responsible for cultivating the MGA's reputation as one of the nation's premier tournament organizations.

"For the past three decades Gene Westmoreland's extraordinary work has brought the MGA's tournament program national recognition," said MGA Executive Director Jay Mottola, who has worked side by side with Westmoreland during his entire career at the MGA. "Gene's contributions to the MGA, however, go way beyond just tournaments. There is not one MGA program or activity that has not been positively impacted by his vears of dedicated service."

Westmoreland is a lifelong resident of Westchester County, born in New Rochelle and raised in Harrison. He got his start in golf as a caddie at Harrison Country Club (now Willow Ridge), where he took a keen interest in the game as well as its Rules and etiquette. He pursued his undergraduate studies at Pace University and coached there for 14 years after graduation, rising to become head coach of the school's varsity baseball and basketball teams, as well as the assistant athletic director. He is a member of the Pace Athletic Hall of Fame.

In 1978, Westmoreland looked for a way to get more involved with golf, and became a member of the MGA's field team, which helps conduct the on-site activities at MGA tournaments during the summer months. He made a fast name for himself with his encyclopedic knowledge of the game and his superb organizational skills, and in 1980, he was hired full-time to take over the tournament department. From the start, he showed an innate capability to manage the many tentacles of the MGA tournament program: the corps of more than 300 volunteer officials and 5,000 active competitors, the screening of host clubs and courses years in advance, and the logistical challenges of a calendar that

Westmoreland keeps a close eye on pace of play at all MGA championships.





Westmoreland and MGA Executive Director Jay Mottola at Winged Foot during the 2002 Met Open.



sees the MGA conduct more than 80 tournament days (including both MGA and USGA qualifiers) in the busy summer season.

This is no easy feat, but "The General"—Gene is a distant relative of former U.S. Army general William Westmoreland—is renowned

for his calm demeanor and personal touch. He knows the majority of the MGA's tournament competitors by name, and has an extraordinary talent for scheduling the Association's championships at the finest courses. He is quick with a smile, and just as quick with a stern reminder to competitors to keep a reasonable pace of play and conduct themselves in a manner befitting the game and the host clubs.

"In the process of building the finest regional tournament program in the country, Gene has developed wonderful friendships and relationships with the players, tournament volunteers and all of the clubs in the Met Area," said MGA Vice President and tournament competitor, Al Small. "Gene is a true ambassador for the game, and there is certainly no person more respected and revered in our golfing community."

During his tenure, Westmoreland played a critical role in the MGA's 1986 acquisition of the Ike Championship, which is now the Met Area's premier amateur stroke play event. He also supervised the re-launch of the MGA Public Links Championship and the debut of the Women's Public Links, as well as the introduction of events such

as the Senior Net Four-Ball, Father & Son Net Tournament, Women's Net Team and Senior Open. The addition of these events has helped attract a much wider audience to MGA tournament competitions. In 2007, he oversaw the creation of another new championship, the MGA Mid-Amateur, whose permanent trophy, the Westmoreland Cup, was named in his honor.

A nationally respected authority on the Rules of Golf. Gene has been instrumental in recruiting Rules and Competitions volunteers who add so much to the quality of MGA events. Gene has served on the Rules Committee for several USGA championships. including the 2002, 2004 and 2006 U.S. Opens, all of which were played in the Met Area. He has worked for many years with local high school and college golf coaches to ensure that a proper understanding of the Rules and etiquette of the game was being passed to the next generation. A past president of the International Association of Golf Administrators, Gene was also influential in the area of golf course maintenance, working closely with area superintendents on many projects, including the creation of the Tri-State Turf Research Foundation. He was given the Metropolitan Golf Course Superintendents Association's highest honor, the John Reid Lifetime Achievement Award, in 2005.

"I am honored to receive this award from the MGA, an organization I revere and which holds a place of honor in the world of golf," said Westmoreland. "It is truly humbling to realize that my name will be included among some of the true giants of the game as winners of the MGA Distinguished Service Award."

At the MGA Annual Meeting, USGA Executive Director David Fay, who began his career in golf at the MGA, presented Westmoreland with his award. "Gene was ahead of the curve in so many ways," said Fay. "His influence on tournament administration extends well beyond the Met Area, to every corner of the country. The USGA has benefited considerably from Gene's knowledge, judgment and dedication over the past 30 years. The golf community owes Gene a collective, heartfelt 'thank you' for his outstanding service to our sport. Gene is a special person and he richly deserves this prestigious honor."

Gene Westmoreland leaves a lasting legacy of excellence for the next generation of leaders. Rarely has a person given so much to the MGA and the game as a whole, making him uniquely deserving of an award given for distinguished service.

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