

GOLF'S GUARDIAN ANGEL

No one deserves the MGA's Distinguished Service Award more than Joe Donahue, who has been an integral part of Met Area golf for 40 years

by Jeanne McCooley

Joe Donahue, recipient of the MGA's 1993 Distinguished Service Award, stepped up to the microphone to receive his award at the Association's annual dinner on December 1. He thanked all the right people, acknowledged the support he has received over the years as an officer and three-term president of the MGA, and expressed his sincere pleasure at being part of the DSA's distinguished list of past recipients. Not surprisingly, his speech was also punctuated with a good deal of mild-mannered poignant humor that has become his trademark. At the close of his remarks, however, Joe took a serious stand and admonished club leaders to commit themselves to a continuing awareness of the serious problems facing them and to start planning to deal with the future stability of their clubs.

An inappropriate ending on such a festive occasion? Maybe. But for those in the audience who know Joe well and the deep concern he has for this game and its future—the ending was pure Donahue. It also served to under-

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score why the MGA was so proud to present this tireless and prolific servant of golf with its highest honor.

Born in 1926, and graduated from Lehigh University in '49, Joe Donahue began his service to golf nearly 40 years ago as MGA tournament official. His extraordinary leadership ability and willingness to invest his time and effort were immediately evident, and in 1970 he was elected to the MGA Executive Committee. He served as Chairman of the Real Estate Tax and Handicap Committees during some of the most challenging periods in the history of the Association. Joe worked to fight damaging new real estate tax legislation and was careful to insure that the MGA play a major role in the creation of the USGA's GHIN Handicap Service. And through Joe's encouragement, the MGA became the first golf association to offer its member clubs in-house computerized handicapping, a service enjoyed today by over 70 percent of Met Area golfers.

In 1978, Joe was elected vice president of the MGA and two years later he assumed the presidency, which he held for three terms, an honor afforded only four other times in the MGA's 97-year history. During his tenure he oversaw the Association's relocation from New York City to Mamaronock, a move that saved the MGA and its members hundreds of thousands of dollars. However, his greatest legacy to golf was his effort to create a sense of community and cooperation between the MGA and neighboring associations, which is largely responsible for the camaraderie that exists today.

Joe also devoted many years of service to the Long Island Golf Association, as its president and more recently as executive director. Yet he still maintains his active participation on the MGA Long Range Planning Committee and also serves on the Met PGA Advisory Board, and the USGA Sectional Affairs Committee.

Joe Donahue took many pokes at his golf game during his speech on December 1, but, in truth, his playing skills have drawn more praise than humor over the years. He was a three-time champion at Cherry Valley Club in Garden City, NY, where he was a member for 22 years. Joe also won the 1982 MGA Senior Championship during his second year as MGA president. Today he plays out of the Garden City Golf Club, where he continues to be a fine senior player.

Nominations for the DSA Award traditionally bring in endorsements of many unsung heroes who have helped to better the game of golf. Few would argue, however, that Joe Donahue stands above the rest as a extraordinary leader and exceptional servant who has left an indelible mark on the game and on the Met Area. ■

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