

Distinguished Service Award

IF YOU NEED A FAVOR, Jerry Mahoney is a good guy to know. If you need a *big* favor—a ticket to the Masters, a tee time at a posh country club—he is indispensable.

Mahoney was the Metropolitan Golf Association's director of golf programs for the last two decades until a stroke forced him to retire earlier this year. His name (some refer to him as simply, "Mr. Golf") has become synonymous with the MGA and Met Area golf, and rightly so. Walk into any clubhouse, pro shop or grill room in the Met Area, from Maple Moor to Maidstone, and you're sure to run into somebody who knows the 77-year-old Westchester County native. From caddies to club presidents, he could connect with just about anybody, and, in turn, he was an invaluable asset to the MGA.

"I always looked at Jerry as an ambassador for the MGA," says MGA Executive Director Jay Mottola. "He represented the MGA and golf beautifully."

Mahoney is a Yonkers man through and through. He was born there, raised there, and, save for his years of service in World War II, never left there. Immediately after graduating high school, he joined the Merchant Marines. He went on to spend three and a half years during the war stationed in the South Pacific and the Mediterranean.

In 1946, Mahoney returned home and, along with his late brother, Bernie, went to work at his father's car dealership, Mahoney Motor Sales, in Yonkers. The business was suc-



Mr. Golf

*Jerry Mahoney, a fixture in Met Area golf for more than 30 years, **Alan Bastable** reports, is the recipient of the MGA's Distinguished Service Award for 2001*

cessful, and eventually his father passed ownership on to his two sons.

Not long after his return from the war, Mahoney's passion for golf began to blossom. He joined the now-defunct Hudson River Country Club in Yonkers (it was sold in 1966 and turned into an industrial park) as well as Winged Foot Golf Club in Mamaroneck. At first, he played only on weekends and mostly at Hudson River—it was only 10 minutes from home—but his game improved quickly.

Then an article in *Esquire* featuring a list of the Top 50 courses in the United States piqued his interest. "He was determined to play every one of them," recalls Peg, Mahoney's wife of 53 years. "He started by using his summer vacations. But before he got even half done, the list began to change; some courses were added, some were deleted." So Mahoney created his own list, "America's 100 Greatest Golf

Courses," and had it printed and framed. The list still hangs on a wall at Golf Central today—and, yes, he has played every one of them.

In the early 1950s, Mahoney and Doug Ford, the 1950 Masters champion and also a Yonkers native, purchased some land on Tuckahoe Road in their hometown and opened a driving range. The business did well, but Ford, who still played on Tour, had little time to manage the range, and Mahoney, to the chagrin of his father and brother, was spending more time there than at the dealership. So after two years or so, they had little choice but to sell the range.

Mahoney's career in golf, however, was just getting started. He began volunteering on the MGA's Tournament Committee in 1966, growing progressively more involved each year. "He loved the camaraderie," Peg says. "He loved being around people, particularly if it was involved with golf. He was a great emissary for the game."

In 1978, he and his brother sold Mahoney Motors, and three years later Mahoney decided he wanted to work for the MGA full time. "He came to us and said he just loved golf and he thought he could help us out," recalls Joe Donahue, then the MGA president (and a former DSA recipient himself). The association was searching for a new executive director at the time to replace Jim McLoughlin. Donahue already was talking with Mottola, then a relatively new staff member who he saw as a solid long-term candidate. But he also liked what Mahoney had to offer, so he devised a "package deal" in which he hired Mahoney as executive director with the provision that Mottola would take over after another year's experience.

Mahoney was happy to oblige, and after a year in the top spot, he stepped into his new role as director of golf programs. It was a perfect fit for Mahoney because he spent most of his time interacting and networking with clubs, what he loved to do most. "He proved to be remarkable in terms of his personal relationships and his ability to get things done," Donahue recalls.

His primary role with the MGA was to establish relationships with new or soon-to-open clubs in the Met Area, though he really was a jack-of-all-trades. He also assisted with course ratings and tournament officiating.

But perhaps Mahoney's greatest accomplishment during his tenure was the relationship he fostered between MetLife and the MGA. In 1980, with Mahoney's persuasion, MetLife became, and has remained to this day, the MGA's primary corporate sponsor. (Today MetLife sponsors nine MGA events.)

Assigning Mahoney to MetLife was a "master stroke," says Ivar Quigley, MetLife's vice president of public relations

until his retirement in 1996. "I couldn't have asked for a better person to work with. He was incredibly talented and smart, and he knew exactly how to handle MetLife's needs."

"Not only was Jerry a key to our long and rewarding relationship," echoes Cathy O'Brien, MetLife's current director of sports programming and blimp operations, "but he became a great friend to myself and many others at MetLife."

Mahoney also forged many relationships at Winged Foot where he spent much of his free time after Hudson River closed. "Everybody knew him and loved him," says Jack Megly, a long-time member and close friend of Mahoney's. Megly also remembers Mahoney's generosity. He wouldn't have to sit around the grill room long, Megly says, before a member would approach him to ask a favor—whether it was for Giants tickets or a tee time at an exclusive club. "Not easy chores," he recalls. "But sure enough Jerry would get on the phone, and a day or two later he'd have whatever that person had asked for."

"He was just a pleasure to be around," says golf professional David Glenz, who joined the Winged Foot staff as an assistant pro in 1978 (and today is the director of golf at the Crystal Springs Golf and Spa Resort in New Jersey). "Jerry was one of the first people I played golf with at Winged Foot, and one of the first to take lessons from me."

Not that he needed lessons. Mahoney was a skilled player; he was the club champion at Hudson River from 1964 to '67, and also qualified for the New York State Amateur in 1960.

Mahoney still resides in Yonkers today. His stroke has left him paralyzed, but the support the Mahoneys have received from the golf community and beyond, Peg says, has been overwhelming.

His old pal Ivar Quigley, however, says he will always remember Mahoney at the top of his game. "I'll remember Jerry as a gregarious and fun-loving character," he says. "And as a guy who knew his stuff—he knew golf and he knew people."

No one can argue with that. And no one can argue that he richly deserves the MGA's highest honor. 