

OHIO'S WILLIAM J. POWELL, A PIONEER IN DIVERSITY IN GOLF, NAMED RECIPIENT OF 2009 PGA DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

William J. (Bill) Powell of East Canton, Ohio, who overcame racial barriers to become the only African-American to design, build, own and operate a golf course while pioneering diversity in the game, has been named the recipient of the 2009 PGA Distinguished Service Award.

Powell, 92, and a PGA Life Member, will be honored in conjunction with the 91st PGA Championship at Hazeltine National Golf Club in Chaska, Minn. The award presentation will be conducted Aug. 12, in downtown Minneapolis. The PGA Distinguished Service Award is the Association's highest annual honor.

"William Powell's dream to build a golf course where players regardless of the color of their skin would be welcome was a task that he met under great duress, hardship and personal sacrifice," said PGA of America President Jim Remy. "Yet, Mr. Powell displayed exceptional courage, grace and the finest character while persevering toward his goal of opening Clearview Golf Club.

"He and his family represent the best in our sport and what it means to treat one's neighbor with dignity and respect. The PGA of America is extremely proud to be presenting Mr. Powell, a legend in our time, with the 2009 PGA Distinguished Award."

Powell is the father of PGA and LPGA Professional Renee Powell, the 2003 PGA First Lady of Golf and the second African-American to compete on the LPGA Tour. Renee is the PGA head professional at Clearview Golf Club in East Canton, Ohio, where she is joined by her brother, Larry, a member of the Golf Course Superintendents of America.

In September 1946, while denied a G.I. Loan despite serving honorably in the U.S. Army Air Corps, Bill Powell received the financial backing of two black physicians in nearby Canton and Massillon, Ohio, to begin building a public golf course. Powell added his own part of the necessary capital after his brother, Berry, took out a loan on his home.

Powell's dream took fruit in April 1948, with nine holes opening for play on the former dairy farmland. A decade later, Powell bought out his partners and added an additional 52 acres for a second nine holes.

The complete 18-hole layout was opened for play in 1978. Powell's family, including his late wife, Marcella; eldest son, Billy (now deceased); daughter Renee; son Larry and a close friend, the late Euley Green, formed the workforce that prepared and polished Clearview.

Today, Clearview Golf Club is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Powell once described Clearview, a 130-acre property, as "America's Course . . . a course where the only color that matters is the color of the greens."

"This is quite an honor, and it is something I savor due to so many good people in The PGA that made it happen," said Powell. "I am so humbled to have people think this way of me. I have had so many special things happen to me, I believe, because golf sees no color. It is a game that brings out the best in people and it is vital to young people. Golf means nothing but good. If you can get young people in the game, then they are good for all their lives."

Powell said that he believes that when Clearview Golf Club opened for play in 1948, it truly represented "America's First Tee."

"I have not reached my dream, but at the same time I feel thankful that we have made a good start and have worked to get everyone into the game," Powell said. "I think people realize how hard I worked to get this course started, but they didn't understand why I was so motivated. I had a lot of anxiety; I felt that something was going to happen before I finished.

Twenty four hours in the day was not enough!"

Powell said that his longevity has more to do with his environment and the influence of his parents.

"I was not naïve to think that everything was nice when I was growing up," he said. "But, because I had good parents and my mother sent me to Bible school, I had a crutch to lean on. I have been just lucky, I guess. And, I had to believe in the Man above."

Born Nov. 22, 1916, in Butler County, Greenville, Ala., Powell was the third child of six children of Berry and Massaleaner Powell. As the post-World War I economy shifted, the Powell family moved to Minerva, Ohio, where Berry Powell ended his business of owning a general store and found steady work in a pottery factory.

Bill Powell discovered a love for golf at age 9 by playing and caddying at Edgewater Golf Course. As his own game developed, Powell became a multi-sport athlete at Minerva High School. Powell and his friends formed a golf team and he was asked by the athletic director to serve as captain and coach. That meant Powell would schedule matches against all local schools.

Powell became a fine amateur player and was the first black to compete in a junior event at Orchard Hills Country Club (now Arrowhead Country Club) in north Canton. For two days, the 16-year-old Powell hitchhiked 42 miles round trip to the course and finished third in the tournament.

He later attended Wilberforce University in Xenia, Ohio, where in 1937 the school's men's golf team traveled to face Ohio Northern University at Lost Creek Country Club in Lima, Ohio.

It was the first inter-racial collegiate golf match in American history, with Wilberforce returning home triumphant and also capturing the rematch.

Powell met Marcella Oliver and they were married Nov. 22, 1940, Powell's birthday. Powell went on to serve in the U.S. Army Air Corps through the end of World War II.

He returned to Canton, Ohio, where he continued his position at Timken Company, a roller bearing and steel manufacturer, where he worked for 23 years.

Renee Powell became the second African American female to compete on the LPGA Tour in 1967 and later served as a head professional at a golf club in England. She earned PGA of America membership in 1996.

In 1992, the Powells were honored by the National Golf Foundation as the Jack Nicklaus Golf Family of the Year. That same year, William was awarded the "Cornerstone of Freedom Award" from the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Commission.

In 1996, Powell was inducted into the National Black Golf Hall of Fame and in 1997 was presented Honorary PGA membership by the Northern Ohio PGA Section. In 1999, his membership was made retroactive to Jan. 1, 1962, thus making Powell a PGA Life Member.

Powell also received honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degrees from his alma mater, Wilberforce University, and from Baldwin-Wallace College in Berea, Ohio. In 1999, Powell was a national panelist, invited with his daughter by the Smithsonian Institution to discuss African Americans and the Game of Golf: Past, Present and Future.

The Tiger Woods Foundation today annually awards the William and Marcella Powell Scholarships. In 2007, William and Renee Powell were inducted into the Ohio Golf Hall of Fame.

The PGA Distinguished Service Award, inaugurated in 1988, honors outstanding individuals who display leadership and humanitarian qualities, including integrity, sportsmanship and enthusiasm for the game of golf.

PGA Distinguished Service Award Recipients

1988 Herb Graffis	1989 Bob Hope	1990 No recipient	1991 The Hon. Gerald Ford
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1992 Gene Sarazen	1993 Byron Nelson	1994 Arnold Palmer	1995 Patty Berg
1996 Frank Chirkinian	1997 The Hon. George H.W. Bush	1998 Paul Runyan	1999 Bill Dickey
2000 Jack Nicklaus	2001 Mark McCormack	2002 Tim Finchem	2003 Vince Gill
2004 Pete Dye	2005 Wally Uihlein	2006 Fred Ridley	2007 Jack Burke Jr.
2008 Dennis Walters	2009 William J. Powell		

About The PGA of America

Since 1916, The PGA of America's mission has been twofold; to establish and elevate the standards of the profession and to grow interest and participation in the game of golf.

By establishing and elevating the standards of the golf profession through world-class education, career services, marketing and research programs, the Association enables PGA Professionals to maximize their performance in their respective career paths and showcases them as experts in the game and in the multi-billion dollar golf industry.

By creating and delivering dramatic world-class championships and exciting and enjoyable golf promotions that are viewed as the best of their class in the golf industry, The PGA of America elevates the public's interest in the game, the desire to play more golf, and ensures accessibility to the game for everyone, everywhere. The PGA of America brand represents the very best in golf.

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