



**IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**A PIONEER PASSES: PGA LIFE MEMBER WILLIAM J. POWELL,  
A HUMBLE LEADER IN BUILDING DIVERSITY IN GOLF, DIES AT 93**

PALM BEACH GARDENS, Fla. – PGA Life Member William James (Bill) Powell of East Canton, Ohio, the only African American to build, own and operate a golf course, and a selfless ambassador for building diversity in the game, died Thursday afternoon at Aultman Hospital in Canton following complications from a stroke. He was 93.

Powell had celebrated in 2009 what he recently called “the best year of my life” - a season of tributes highlighted by his receiving in August the PGA Distinguished Service Award, the Association’s highest annual honor. In November, Powell was inducted into the Northern Ohio PGA Hall of Fame; was named Person of the Year by the Ohio Golf Course Owners Association, and the Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce presented the Powell family its Community Salute Award.

“Bill Powell will forever be one of golf’s most unforgettable American heroes,” said PGA of America President Jim Remy. “Bill made us appreciate the game and each other that much more by his gentle, yet firm example. He was born with a fire within his heart to build on his dream. In the process, he made golf a beacon for people of all color. The PGA of America is better today because of individuals like Bill Powell. We will miss him dearly. We extend our thoughts and prayers to his family as we remember a wonderful man.”

Powell was preceded in death by his wife, Marcella, and a son, William. He is survived by his daughter, Renee, a PGA/LPGA Professional and the second African American to compete on the LPGA Tour; a son, Larry, who has served for more than 30 years as superintendent at Clearview Golf Club; and twin sisters Mary Alice Walker of Akron, Ohio, and Rose Marie Mathews of Minerva, Ohio.

Funeral arrangements for Mr. Powell have yet to be announced. In lieu of flowers, donations should be directed to The Clearview Legacy Foundation for Education, Preservation and Research, a 501(c) 3 charitable foundation, which will help perpetuate Mr. Powell’s vision for America’s Course. The Foundation is found at P.O. Box 30196, East Canton, OH 44730, or by visiting [www.clearview-gc.com](http://www.clearview-gc.com) , or by phone: (330) 488-0404.

“I hope that I have created more awareness about what Clearview is all about,” Powell said in November following his Northern Ohio PGA Hall of Fame induction. “We have had many people come to visit us, including some from Canada. They now know who we are. I watched on TV golf being played in Shanghai, China, and I do believe that the game of golf is the best vehicle to rid hate in the world.”

The grandson of Alabama slaves, Powell earned the rank of Technical Sergeant in the U.S. Eighth Air Force Truck Battalion in World War II, and during his term of service was able to play golf throughout Great Britain.

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He would return home and create Clearview Golf Club as a lasting monument to opening doors of opportunity after he had been denied so many pathways to equality throughout his life. Powell worked 18-hour days to both support his family and build Clearview. Denied a G.I. Loan, Powell found funding for his dream from two African American physicians in Ohio, while his brother took out a second mortgage on his home.

Powell went on to carve Clearview Golf Club out of former dairy farmland in the autumn of 1946, clearing the land himself – many hours by hand. In the process, Powell broke down racial barriers without fanfare by developing women and youth golf leagues. Clearview opened its initial nine holes in 1948. Powell eventually repaid his benefactors to gain full ownership, and an additional nine holes was completed in 1978.

Clearview Golf Club is on the National Register of Historic Places, and nicknamed “America’s Course.” It is a piece of property, said Powell, where “the only color that matters is the color of the greens.”

During Clearview’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Powell reflected upon his creation in his 2000 autobiography, *“Clearview: America’s Course.”*

“I didn’t build this course for any of the recognition,” he said. “It was a labor of love. Golf is a part of society and I wanted to be included. I want you to be included, too. I’ve always felt that each individual should leave something behind of meaning. It feels good to know that I have done that with Clearview, at long last.”

Powell’s fulfillment of a dream to own his own golf course was a life’s journey that crossed racial boundaries, withstood numerous obstacles and incidents of racism since the opening of the course and throughout its operation.

Throughout his career, Powell never hesitated to share a passion and respect for golf among those who otherwise would never have had the opportunity to discover themselves.

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 in 1919 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 was one of the star football players at his high school on a 1932 Minerva team that finished the season unbeaten and unscored upon.

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 The Fairways Golf Club) in North Canton. For two days, the 16-year-old Powell hitchhiked 42 miles round trip to the course and after having led the tournament until the final few holes, he finished third.

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.

Powell was the teacher-coach of his daughter, Renee, who competed from 1967 to 1980 on the LPGA Tour and later served as a head professional at a golf club in England. Renee, who earned PGA of America membership in 1996, followed in her father's footsteps as a promoter of the game and was the 2003 PGA First Lady of Golf.

"My father made a mark," said Renee Powell. "And, I believe that God wanted people to know the mark that he made on this nation."

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 by the Smithsonian Institution to discuss *African Americans and the Game of Golf: Past, Present and Future*.

Powell's legacy in golf is enshrined by The First Tee, which has distributed more than 1,100 William J. Powell Scholarships that allow youngsters to attend The First Tee Life Skills and Leadership Academies conducted on college campuses.

At those same academies, young men vie for the Dr. William J. Powell Outstanding Male Leader Award. The scholarship has provided opportunities for participants to learn valuable character education and receive leadership instruction through workshops, career exploration seminars and golf clinics. The academies have attracted young people from more than 100 cities in 30 states, plus Ireland, New Zealand and Singapore.

### **William J. Powell & Family Honors**

- 1992 National Golf Foundation - Jack Nicklaus Golf Family of the Year
- 1996 – William Powell, Inductee into Black Golf Hall of Fame
- 1998 – William Powell, Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters, Baldwin-Wallace College  
Legend of Golf Award, The Woodholme Foundation  
William and Marcella Powell Scholarship, The Tiger Woods Foundation  
Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame
- 1999 PGA of America Life Membership
- 1999 – Congressional Black Caucus Foundation – Unsung Hero Award
- 2001 – William Powell, PGA of America Life Membership  
Doctor of Humane Letters, Wilberforce University

2004 One of 40 veterans invited by the Smithsonian Institution to serve as panelists at the dedication of the National World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C.

2007 – Dr. William J. Powell Outstanding Male Leader Award, first presented nationwide by The First Tee (*through donation of Fred Tattersall*)

2007 – William and Renee Powell, Inductees, Ohio Golf Hall of Fame

2009 – Recipient, PGA of America Distinguished Service Award

Person of the Year, Ohio Golf Course Owners Association

Inductee, Northern Ohio PGA Hall of Fame

Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce Community Salute Award

***The PGA of America, 100 Avenue of the Champions, Palm Beach Gardens, FL 33418***

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