

# CITY & SHORE

MAGAZINE

## FOR MORE WOMEN, GOLF DRIVES BUSINESS SUCCESS

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By Dave Wieczorek

As an 18-year-old rookie just out of Rosarian Academy in West Palm Beach, Michelle McGann was already a striking figure on the LPGA Tour. She was a 5-foot-11 blonde with a smile as wide as a fairway. Over the next 24 years she would develop a reputation for being long off the tee and accurate around the greens and become recognizable a three-iron shot away by the jaunty straw hats she wore. By the time she retired from the tour in 2012, she had won eight tournaments and earned more than \$3.2 million.

Sinking tourney-winning birdie putts wasn't the only thing McGann accomplished on the golf course though. When she wasn't competing against the world's greatest female golfers, she was participating in pro-ams (pros and amateurs playing together), charity events and friendly rounds while chatting up everyone from the titans of business to U.S. presidents Ford, Bush – 41 and 43 – and Clinton. The connections made through such networking opened doors to a world far beyond the golf course.

"I was fortunate that I had a great opportunity to meet a lot of CEOs," says McGann, who now lives at the Lost Tree Club in North Palm Beach with her husband, Jonathan Satter, a commercial real-estate salesman. "At the time, when you're that young, you're not really understanding, 'Wow, I have this opportunity to use my golf game as a tool to meet people in the highest levels.' "

People like Steven Burd, former CEO of Safeway, Inc., the giant supermarket chain; and Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric.

"I'd say to somebody, 'I played with Jack Welch the other day,' and she'd say, 'Omgod! You know him?' 'Yeah, he's one of my friends now.' "

Burd and his wife, Chris, became McGann's close friends due in part to Chris and McGann both being Type 1 diabetics.

McGann was in her early 20s when she was asked to pair up with Burd in a pro-am tournament in California.

"We'd played one or two holes when Steve said, 'By the way, my wife has diabetes too,' " she remembers. "If I hadn't played with Steve, I wouldn't have known about Chris, and we wouldn't have developed our relationship."

Many of the relationships she developed over the years have played roles in her charitable endeavors, including the Michelle McGann Golf Classic, which benefits the Diabetes Research Institute. (This year's event will be held Oct. 24 at Lost Tree.)

### Power of the Purse

Building relationships – social, business, philanthropic – through golf is something men have been doing for generations. Women more recently have discovered the benefits of whacking and chasing a dimpled ball for a morning or an afternoon. At the forefront of this movement is the Executive Women's Golf Association (EWGA), which has its headquarters in Palm Beach Gardens.

Since its creation in 1991, the EWGA has established some 125 chapters with more than 14,000 members throughout the United States, Canada, Bermuda, South Africa and Italy. Members range from former LPGA champions McGann and Hall of Famer Judy Rankin to cremations marketer Betsy Scott to University of Miami President Donna Shalala.

The organization's activities include tournaments, "after work" nine-hole league play, business networking and social functions, weekend golf outings, seminars, education programs and charity fundraisers.

While only 19 percent of all golfers are women, according to the National Golf Foundation, EWGA's Chief Executive Officer Pam Swensen estimates that members contribute more than \$66 million annually to the overall golf economy.

"We consider this serious 'purse power,'" says Swensen, a former telecommunications executive.

That purse power is likely to grow.

"Over the years we were beginning to see that women were an untapped market," says Alessandra Bollero, 25, global marketing specialist for Wilson Sporting Goods Co., who played golf at Cardinal Newman High School in West Palm Beach. "Now, along with the Hispanic sector, women are the fastest growing market. This is influencing equipment manufacturers."

"More than half the graduates from business schools are women," Swensen says. "So you've got this highly educated female work force who want to climb the ladder and get ahead. I see this across many organizations. Golf can help separate you from your competition."

Swensen likes "to think of that little white golf ball as much more than just something you hit on the golf course. To me it's a crystal ball that you can look into to see how golf can transform your life. It opens doors."

Some of those opened doors are described by 31 women who each wrote a chapter in *Teeing Up for Success*, published in February by the EWGA Foundation, the EWGA's charitable arm.

Among the contributors is Shalala. Before being named president of the University of Miami in 2001, Shalala served eight years as Secretary of Health and Human Services under President Bill Clinton. She writes in *Teeing Up* that "the broad difference in our ability was never an obstacle to sharing a rewarding game. Golf is a great equalizer. We're all created equal when caught between a rock and a hard place ... or a bunker.

"The president would come up to me before a cabinet meeting and say, 'You know that ninth hole at the course we played the other day? I hit a ball 210 yards and got to the green!' He was so animated that everyone thought we were discussing the Middle East conflict or another topic of global importance."

## Cardigan 'Aha' Moment

Golf being the great equalizer is the message the EWGA sends to women golfers of all ages, and especially those who have yet to consider the benefits of the game.

Barbara Gutstadt, 60, is a former financial planner and "serial entrepreneur" who has started up and sold at least half a dozen companies. Her current enterprise is Women's Golf and Travel Concierge, which arranges golf-and-travel trips around the world.

"My daughter's friend was going for an interview in Chicago for a job as a meeting planner, so I said, 'Let's test this. Put on your resume that you play golf and see what happens,'" says Gutstadt, a member of the Coral Ridge Country Club who has homes in Fort Lauderdale and Fort Myers. "She said, 'But I don't play golf.' I said, 'I can get you there. Just put it on your resume and see what happens.'"

Golf talk consumed almost the entire interview.

"She got hired because she could relate to the clients who were going to be coming in for golf events," Gutstadt explains. "Had she not put golf on her resume, she would have been just like every other woman out there. Golf gets you noticed."

Gutstadt, who has been golfing for 25 years and shoots in the low 90s, wrote in her chapter of Teeing Up: "I began to notice very early in my business career how my male colleagues used golf to build relationships. I also noticed how they were generating more sales than me. It made me wonder if the difference could have been that they were deepening client relationships on the golf course. The answer was yes."

When she asked an insurance executive to play a round with her, he turned down Gutstadt twice. The third time she asked, Gutstadt says, he finally admitted he was reluctant because he "sprayed the ball all over the course and was concerned that I would beat him. A light went off in my head."

She invited the executive – and he accepted – to play in her company's scramble tournament, a format in which teams of four players hit their tee shots and then choose the best of the four for the next shot. The process is repeated until the hole is completed.

"He brought another insurance executive with him, and I ended up getting two major contracts," Gutstadt says. "That was my 'aha' moment, that a woman golfer really stood out. Golf never left my tool box from that moment on."

One of the companies Gutstadt founded, more than 25 years ago, was acquired by another firm.

"There were 13 presidents of the different subsidiaries, and two of us were women," she says. "When we had our corporate outings we were left behind – manning the office. I was very competitive and said I want to play golf. It was that simple. I didn't realize at the time it was good business too. Once I figured out the power of golf and the connections and bonding that happens out on the golf course, that's when I started taking it seriously."

Recognizing that golf can close the gender gap is a vital lesson.

“As you climb the ranks in the business world, you learn that men are playing golf. Sometimes if you want to hang with them, you’ve got to be like them,” says Betsy Scott, 29, of Fort Lauderdale, national manager of sales strategy for the Neptune Society, one of the largest providers of cremation services in the country.

“I have a friend in sales who does a lot of schmoozing and socializing. She asked if I thought she should take golf lessons. I told her, ‘Absolutely. It’s the smart thing to do. Now that we’re in our late 20s, early 30s, we’re at the right age, we’re getting invited to various outings, we’re going to have access.’ ”

At age 26, LPGA Tour star Morgan Pressel of Boca Raton is smack in the middle of that demographic. She encourages young women every opportunity she gets to take up the game to further their careers.

“Women have figured out that men are getting a lot of business done on the golf course, not in the office, and that they’ve been missing out,” says Pressel, whose home course is Boca’s St. Andrews Country Club. “To be included on those special trips to the golf course, in a more relaxed setting, that’s when you can really get business done.”

She learned early on the art of schmoozing with a club in her hand.

“The first thing young kids who play golf are taught is to shake someone’s hand and say, ‘I’m so-and-so. It’s nice to meet you,’ ” says Pressel, the winner of five tournaments, more than \$5 million since joining the LPGA Tour in 2006 and numerous business contracts.

“You’ve got a captive audience when you’re on the golf course. That’s when you can learn a lot about someone by their behavior. You might decide, ‘They’re not the type of person we want to associate with’ or ‘I’m not so sure this is a good deal.’ ”

#### Clubs in the Toolbox

Access and the connections it fosters is “priceless,” says Karen Furtado, 52, a partner at Strategy Meets Action, a strategic-advisory firm in Boston that serves the insurance industry. Business and her duties as chair of the LPGA Foundation board of directors provide frequent opportunities to golf in South Florida.

“There are things you’re never going to learn sitting in an office,” Furtado says. “Every guy that I knew, that I was trying to do business with, no matter where in the U.S. I was doing that business, the minute they heard I golfed, they were all over that. That was a door opener for me. With some of these people, I’d show up for a meeting and we had nothing in common, so golf created a common conversation.”

Furtado, who has been golfing 22 years and shoots in the mid 80s, recalls a conference hosted two years ago by a software company.

“I was one of two women who participated with 16 guys. I had a little chat with my foursome afterward, and one of those people is now a client. You’ve got to be there and be part of the experience. Young people have to understand that golf is a business tool. It’s great to have in your toolbox and to know when to bring it out.”

Jennifer Uman brings it out every chance she gets. The 46-year-old Palm Beach Gardens resident is a project manager for Cummings General Contractors on the Terminal 4 gate-replacement at Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport.

“I’m not closing \$100 million construction projects on the golf course. That’s not the area of my job responsibilities,” Uman says. “But I will say this: There are a half dozen opportunities each spring and summer

for golf events, whether a fundraiser for Florida Atlantic University athletics, which my company is always involved in, or through Associated Builders and Contractors or Associated General Contractors. Very few if any women attend those events, but I always raise my hand.”

When Uman first started using golf as a business tool, “I was very nervous. But the EWGA gives you confidence to play with strangers by pairing you up with people you don’t know at national EWGA tournaments. It’s given me confidence to play with 60 men in a work event.”

Christina Monacelli, a 40-something resident of Palm Beach Gardens and sales rep for Life Fitness exercise equipment, says golf is “crucial for building business relationships. I’m a businesswoman, but business is still run primarily by men. If you’re a woman in the corporate world, you’re surrounded by men. Golf broadens the pool of people I meet.”

That’s what it’s all about, say the veteran businesswomen-golfers, and the sooner young women learn to swing a five-iron with confidence, the more likely they are to improve both their social and business prospects.

“Golf is a game rooted in connections,” says Sandy Cross, director of Women’s and New Market Initiatives for PGA of America in Palm Beach Gardens. “If you play a round of 18 holes, you’re outdoors in a beautiful setting with other individuals for four or five hours. It’s a way to really get to know your playing partners on a different level than you would across a desk or boardroom table. That’s not something you’d get if you went to a movie together or a yoga class.”

No one knows that better than McGann.

“You can’t put a price tag on that one-on-one time with executives,” she says. “He or she gets to know you better so you’re not just Jane Doe.”

No, you’re a woman who’s got game – one who can hole out a birdie putt and drive home a business deal.