



A Culture of Learning

An exclusive interview with
The PGA of America's President Brian Whitcomb

The PGA Professional, a key member of the \$62 billion dollar golf industry, continues to evolve and take an even greater role in the business of golf. Brian Whitcomb, president of The PGA of America, has continued to keep educational programming a core mandate of the world's largest working sports organization to ensure that its members are the best prepared to take charge of their own careers and lead the industry.

Opposite page photos from top to bottom:

Brian Whitcomb (left) presenting Tiger Woods with the Wanamaker Trophy for winning the 89th PGA Championship.

Announcement of the PGA of America/Disabled Sports USA Military Golf Program.

Brian Whitcomb speaking to children attending a Play Golf America clinic at the PGA Championship.

Photos by PGA photographer, Montana Pritchard.

BoardRoom Magazine: The PGA of America is dedicated to its professional development programs, most notably the growing PGA Professional Golf Management (PGA/PGM™) Program. What is the history of this program and how effective has it been in meeting The PGA of America's goal to elevate its membership?

Brian Whitcomb: Since our association's inception in 1916, The PGA of America has been committed to education. Ongoing learning and professional development of our membership is one of our organization's core values.

The PGA/PGM™ University Program, begun in 1975, has more than 1,800 graduates as current PGA members. The program is a four-and-a-half to five-year college curricu-

lum for aspiring PGA Golf Professionals offered at 19 PGA-accredited universities nationwide, including Florida State University, University of Nevada-Las Vegas, New Mexico State University and Methodist University. This past August, we welcomed The University of Central Oklahoma into the program, a school that will open its doors to aspiring PGA Golf Professionals in 2008.

have a college graduate who is ready to go – he or she has gone through the university system and earned an undergraduate degree, all the while integrating professional golf management courses into their educational experience. In addition to invaluable hands-on experience from a 16-month internship programs, they are loaded with a tremendous golf education.

For the industry, the program provides a number of well-trained, excellent candidates to fill the demands of our \$62 billion industry, and one who already has his or her PGA membership card.

BR: So beyond the universities, what tracks do other PGA

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The program's target audience is incoming college freshmen or those who are just beginning their undergraduate education who have a passion for the game of golf. Students attending a university with a PGA/PGM™ program typically graduate with a bachelor's degree in majors ranging from business administration to recreation and park management.

In addition to classroom studies, each student is required to complete approved internships of at least 16 months at golf industry locales. We encourage students to choose three very different internship experiences, for example, splitting their internship at a private 18-hole course and at a public facility.

Those on the PGA/PGM™ track are also required to pass The PGA's Playing Ability Test (PAT); once they have completed all graduation requirements and are eligibly employed in the golf industry, they are card-carrying members of The PGA of America.

BR: How does the PGA/PGM™ program benefit both the industry and the graduate?

BW: We have a number of programs designed to provide continuing education throughout the year, and one of the newest is The PGA Certified Professional Program (CPP). Launched in 2004, this online career enhancement program helps PGA Golf Professionals hone their business and management skills. It is an affordable, computer-based curriculum that includes coursework in more than 240 industry-related classes and allows for specialization through certification.

Professionals take to get where they are in their careers?

BW: At this point, the more traditional track for a PGA Professional is still our PGA PGM for those already with a college degree or planning to go directly from high school into the industry. Separate from the university program, the PGA PGM is a three-level program that focuses on core competencies centered around people, the game and the business of golf. In addition, the PGA PGM consists of seminars and self-study courses followed up by work experience activities and testing at the PGA Education Center in Port St. Lucie, Fla. For aspiring PGA Professionals seeking some face-to-face small classroom-style learning as opposed to completing a self-study program we also offer our accelerated program, which began four years ago and combines more than 120 classroom hours with relevant applicable work experience.

BR: After one earns PGA membership, what programs are available for specialization or continuing education?

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The CPP was developed with the input of the PGA Employment Council, which is comprised of highly respected leaders representing all types of golf facilities and industries. It was designed to deliver a highly targeted approach to educating our members in six different career paths – general management, golf operations, instruction, retail, executive management and ownership/leasing. Equally important, the CPP prepares PGA Golf Professionals for lifelong learning that will help continue to distinguish them as the game's leading managers.

The goal is to help PGA Golf Professionals develop specific competencies within their career path. This essentially makes them a specialist in that career path and more marketable as a PGA Golf Professional. Today's PGA Golf Professionals have more options than ever before, and we hope these programs help the best and the brightest determine their own career paths.

BR: Once PGA Golf Professionals gain the skills and knowledge they need to do their jobs as best as possible, how are these skills applied in the golf industry?

BW: I think the best example of this is Play Golf America, which is an industry-wide national marketing campaign developed and led by The PGA of America to increase participation among new and existing golfers and to grow the

number of people who play the game, regardless of their skill level.

As the instructors of the game, PGA and LPGA Golf Professionals are encouraged to develop programs at their facilities that reach out to various segments such as: beginners, families, couples, children, business professionals, senior citizens, disabled golfers, etc. These PGA Golf Professionals can offer programs that best suit their existing customers' needs, as well as help them attract new customers to their facility and the game of golf.

BR: What are some of the programs under the umbrella of Play Golf America?

BW: Play Golf America programs continue to grow each year. Some of those programs include: PGA Free Lesson Month, Women's Golf Week, Take Your Daughter to the Course Week and Family Golf Month. This past May, we celebrated the 10th anniversary of Free Lesson Month. In the span of the 10 years, PGA Professionals have given out more than 800,000 free lessons. **BR**

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