



Honoree Shirley Spork

Shirley Spork, LPGA founding member, helped to provide one of the greatest legacies of women's golf; the establishment of the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA). Growing up in Detroit during the depression era, her family's property adjoined Bonnie Brook Golf Course where she a pop stand and sold lost golf balls back to the golfers. At thirteen, she purchased her first club, a putter, for the sum of one dollar. Taking a job as a caddie allowed her practice time to build her skills.

Spork graduated from Michigan State Normal College, now Eastern Michigan University, during which time she won the first National Intercollegiate Championship in 1947. A year after graduation, 1950, she played her first tournament as a pro at the Weathervane Western Open in Chicago. This set the stage for her to be among 13 professionals designated as official founding members when, four months later at a tournament in Wichita, Kansas, the LPGA charter was presented. As an early player of a women's pro sport, Shirley experienced important firsts, like playing in the first televised LPGA event and being the first woman professional to give clinics in Europe for sponsor Golfcraft (aka Titleist). On March 19, she will play in the first LPGA tournament in 2014, the "Founder's Cup;" paired with Mike Whan, LPGA commissioner, Mike Davis, USGA Executive director and Mike Gould, Chicago Bears place kicker.

Additional Tournament History:

- ◆ 1946, 47, 48 –Women's District Match Play Champion
- ◆ 1949 –Michigan Amateur winner
- ◆ Tam O Shanter All American Amateur winner
- ◆ 1950 – top 10 on the LPGA's money list
- ◆ 1959 – California Derby Open Champion
- ◆ 1962 – LPGA Championship, 2nd place
- ◆ 1962 –Carling Eastern Open, 4th place

Shirley had an analytical eye for the golf swing and knowledge of teaching techniques necessary to be a consummate instructor. In the early 1950's, Shirley taught golf at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. In the late 1950's, she began a career as a teaching professional. A 1954 position at Tamarisk CC in Palm Springs had Shirley teaching celebrity members like Kirk Douglas, Danny Kaye and Dean Martin. Over time, Shirley held a teaching professional job at five other locations settling at Monterey CC in Palm Desert, CA. Shirley used every avenue available to promote women's golf, including two articles for Sports Illustrated: "Restraining Excessive Body Action," Nov 24, 1958 and "Especially For Women Golfers," Feb 18, 1957.

Not surprising, given her expertise in teaching, the LPGA recruited Shirley to serve on a committee to design a school to educate professional golf teachers. The first National LPGA Golf School for Teachers opened at the University of Michigan in 1960. She co-chaired the schools and chaired the LPGA's Teaching and Club Professional Division (T&CP) from 1960-65. A full-time position followed, from 1970-78, as the Western educational director for the National Golf Foundation, making her the first LPGA professional to conduct golf clinics in foreign countries. After more than 3,000 workshops for teaching professionals, Shirley opened her own school in 1979 as director of instruction for The School of Golf for Women Only, at Singing Hills Resort, El Cahn, CA focusing on teaching women golfers "how to learn to play golf" (Vold, 1999). In 1984, she became one of only two golfers voted the National Teacher of the Year twice.

Awards as an LPGA founder and educator:

- ◆ 1959 &1984 – LPGA National Teacher of the Year award
- ◆ 1976 – Joe Graffis Award
- ◆ 1981 – first female inducted into the E-Club Hall of Fame
- ◆ 1989 – Meritorious Service Award
- ◆ 1994 – Byron Nelson Award
- ◆ 1998 – Ellen Griffin Rolex Award, the LPGA's highest teaching honor
- ◆ 2000 – LPGA Teaching and Club Professional (T&CP) Hall of Fame inaugural class inductee
- ◆ 2000 – Commissioner's Award
- ◆ 2001 – Executive Women's Golf Association's Leadership Award
- ◆ 2002 – Detroit Redford High School Alumni Award
- ◆ 2002 – Michigan Golf Hall of Fame inductee
- ◆ 2003 – Minerva Foundation of British Columbia honor



References:

Vold, Mona. (1999). *Different Strokes: The Lives and Teachings of the Game's Wisest Women*. New York: Simon & Schuster.