



Golf Entertainer-Motivator Dennis Walters Named Recipient of 2008 PGA Distinguished Service Award; to be Honored in August at 90th PGA Championship

PGA Honorary Member Dennis Walters will be honored in a ceremony on Aug. 6, during the 90th PGA Championship at Oakland Hills Country Club in Bloomfield Township, Mich. The PGA Distinguished Service Award is the Association's highest annual honor.

PALM BEACH GARDENS, Fla. - PGA Honorary Member Dennis Walters of Jupiter, Fla., whose dream of a Tour career ended after a paralyzing accident in 1974, only to become one of golf's most popular and best traveled trick shot entertainers, has been named the recipient of the 2008 PGA Distinguished Service Award.

Walters, 58, will be honored in a ceremony in conjunction with the 90th PGA Championship at Oakland Hills Country Club in Bloomfield Township, Mich. The award presentation will be conducted Aug. 6, at 7 p.m. in the Detroit Symphony Orchestra's Max M. Fisher Music Center. The PGA Distinguished Service Award is the Association's highest annual honor.

"Dennis Walters' courage and determination to rebound from a life-changing tragedy is one of the remarkable success stories in sports," said PGA of America President Brian Whitcomb. "When told that he would never be able to return to the game, Dennis took that as a personal challenge.

"For the past 34 years, Dennis has demonstrated to thousands across the country that you must never abandon your dreams. The PGA of America is proud to bestow the PGA Distinguished Service Award on Dennis Walters, a man who remains one of



our generation's great ambassadors of the game."

Elected to PGA Honorary Membership in 1992, Walters has taken the Dennis Walters Golf Show to 49 states, covering more than 2½ million miles and performing more than 2,600 programs for audiences of all ages.

"I am extremely humbled by this award, the significance being that it comes from my peers in golf," said Walters. "It is the highest recognition that you may receive. I feel that one of my responsibilities is to grow the game of golf. I enjoy introducing golf to youngsters, encouraging them to continue and never give up their dreams. They are the future of golf."

Born in Neptune, N.J., Walters enjoyed a stellar amateur golf career, which included sweeping three state championships in 1967 - the New Jersey State Junior, State Caddie Championship and the State Public Links Junior Championship. He is still the only player to accomplish that feat.

He attended the University of North Texas (formerly North Texas State University), on a golf scholarship and would compete against such future Tour stars as Ben Crenshaw, Tom Kite, Bruce Lietzke and Andy North. Walters graduated in 1971 and turned professional. He did not advance through Tour Qualifying School in the fall of 1972 and worked to hone his skills on the South African Tour.

On July 21, 1974, at Roxiticus Golf Club in Mendham, N.J., while attempting to meet friends on the course, Walters was thrown from a golf cart and suffered severe spinal cord damage. The accident left him a paraplegic.

After his release from a hospital and ensuing months of therapy, Walters began practicing hitting golf balls from a wheelchair. With the help of his father, a swivel seat was mounted on a golf cart with a seat belt. He began to develop his talents in trick shots, having watched film of legendary Joe Kirkwood and attending an exhibition by Paul Hahn Jr.

In 1977, Walters gave a performance at the PGA Merchandise Show in Orlando, Fla. That performance ignited Walters' new-found career, generating countless contacts within the golf industry. As he developed his stage repertoire and polished a message of hope, Walters also added a pet co-star for his traveling show.

His third trusty sidekick, nicknamed Benji Hogan, was rescued by Walters from the Miami-Dade Animal Shelter in 1996, and soon became a major attraction. Benji Hogan would bark answers to mathematical and sports trivia questions, and the terrier mix became the darling of past presidents, Hollywood stars and athletes - once defeating Tiger Woods in a foot race. On May 1, Benji Hogan passed away due to cancer.

Despite the recent loss of his longtime companion, Walters continues his busy schedule, averaging some 90 exhibitions throughout the year entertaining at corporate outings, charity fundraisers and golf events. The winner of the 1978 Ben Hogan Award by the Golf Writers Association of America, Walters' life story was recounted in 2002, while teaming with golf writer James Achenbach for a book, *"In My Dreams I Walk With You."*

"I think if there is an obstacle in your path," Walters wrote, "you have to find a way to either go over it, around it, or cope with it. That's what life is all about. In my case, the medicine was golf."

One of the chief motivating factors for Walters, he said, was listening to a doctor tell him in 1974 that he would never play golf again. Walters said losing the ability to walk made him cry, but someone telling him he would never play golf again made him mad. In February 1975, some 6½ months after being told the crushing news of his condition, Walters returned to the hospital parking lot, called for his doctor and other patients to watch, and drove a golf ball smoothly off into the distance.

"I would never tell anyone that they couldn't do anything. I think that's foolish," said Walters. "The easiest thing to do is to give up, to pack it in. It's not easy to continue, but you have to have a real drive, the passion from within to be able to persevere.

"On your way to success there's going to be a lot of bumps in the road. If you want to do it, you have to figure out a way. In my case, I was encouraged a lot by my family - my mom, my dad and my sister. That's what helped me. But, in the end, you've got to want to do it.

"I've done over 2,600 golf shows and I've never gone out and half-hearted one of them. I'm trying hard on every shot," said Walters. "I know that I don't have a cure for cancer here, but I feel that I have a message that is relatively important to say. People understand that and they take to heart what I tell them. I have met people who saw my show 30 years ago and said that they remember what I said and that makes me feel good. It makes me feel that I have the opportunity and the capacity to give them encouragement and tell them how great the game of golf is."

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	1998 Paul Runyan
1989 Bob Hope	1999 Bill Dickey
1990 No recipient	2000 Jack Nicklaus
1991 The Hon. Gerald Ford	2001 Mark McCormack
1992 Gene Sarazen	2002 Tim Finchem
1993 Byron Nelson	2003 Vince Gill
1994 Arnold Palmer	2004 Pete Dye
1995 Patty Berg	2005 Wally Uihlein

1996 Frank Chirkinian

2006 Fred Ridley

1997 The Hon. George H.W. Bush 2007 Jack Burke Jr.

2008 Dennis Walters

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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 \$76 billion 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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