White to be inducted into LPGA Teaching and Club Professional Hall

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By Brian Biggane - Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Back in the late 1970s and early ’80s, when Wellington was little more than a crossroads, builders offered a unique promotion: Buy a house and get a lesson with LPGA Tour pro Donna Horton White.

Little did those homebuyers know they were getting instruction from a future Golf Digest Top 50 teacher and, as of the first weekend in October, newly inducted member of the LPGA Teaching and Club Professional Hall of Fame.

While the Hall, established in 2000, has only 25 members, White, 61, has had experiences with many of them since graduating from the University of Florida in 1976.

“You look back at the people who have touched your life,” she said. “Marilynn Smith was a mentor when I first went on Tour. I coached Patti Benson at Palm Beach Junior College. DeDe Owens was my college coach (at UNC-Greensboro) and very instrumental in my career.

“The linkage of all those people is why I’m getting this honor.”
White spent 16 years on the LPGA Tour, overcoming a diminutive frame to win three times, before a sinus condition forced her to retire in 1992 at age 38.

“She’s a small woman with a big game, so I want to compliment her on her playing career,” said golf historian Dr. Gary Wiren of North Palm Beach. “Her record is very impressive.”

Returning to Palm Beach County, she became Director of Golf at Wellington Country Club. While that was where her career as a teacher took off, her responsibilities also included overseeing course conditions, the restaurant and other staff.

“It’s always been my passion,” she said of teaching. “I’d kind of block my time: Teach in the morning, then deal with the business part later.”

That was the beginning of her contributions to golf in Palm Beach County, and the end is nowhere in sight. From running junior programs at county facilities she runs at Okeeheelee, Park Ridge and the John Prince Learning Center, to Special Olympics, to PGA Reach programs with disabled veterans, to overseeing the College of Golf program at Keiser University that has just relocated to West Palm Beach, she’s nothing short of a human dynamo.

“To come and run the programs she has in the community that have affected so many people — not only juniors but adults as well — it’s made quite an impact on golf in our area,” Wiren said.

“She’s been very dedicated to the younger generation of players,” fellow Hall of Famer Bob Toski of Boca Raton added. “Her communication skills, her demeanor, the way she works with children, all are secrets to her success as a teacher. She very much deserves to be in the Hall of Fame.”

Wellington native and PGA Tour pro Brooks Koepka got his first exposure to golf when he joined the junior program White ran with Bobby Brown at Okeeheelee Park at age 7.

“That was his first exposure to organized tournaments, to learning how to handle himself as a professional at a young age,” said Bob Koepka, Brooks’ father, adding that Brooks remains committed to the program by providing scholarships.

Proud as she is of what Koepka has accomplished, White is equally proud of all the other young people she’s helped introduce the game who have gone on to become doctors, lawyers and other professionals. And now she’s seeing those graduates starting to send her their own kids.

“I just think the life skills the game brings to the table, the integrity and the honesty it teaches, are so valuable for young people,” she said. “Also, it’s a game you can play at any age. I just love the passion people have for it.”

And Honda Classic Executive Director Ken Kennerly loves how much she’s given back.

“Her commitment to the developmental side and junior golf is phenomenal,” Kennerly said. “It’s another testament to why the game is as great as it is, because people like Donna love the game at its core and want to give back. She’s very deserving.”

PGA President Derek Sprague, whose home club is in upstate New York, also took note of her contributions.
“As a dual PGA/LPGA member, Donna White’s career spans from her competing on the LPGA Tour to serving as a golf business owner and instructor today,” Sprague said. “Donna is known for her innovative teaching methods, which have earned her a ranking among golf’s top instructors.

“The PGA of America congratulates Donna on her induction into the LPGA Teaching and Club Professionals Hall of Fame, a well-deserved honor that recognizes her many accomplishments and advancements in the game.

White, who recently rounded out her own educational résumé by completing a Masters Degree in Science in Education at Keiser, will be inducted along with Shirley Englehorn during the first weekend in October in San Antonio.

“I’m just a lifelong learner,” she said. “The teaching is what I’m most proud of.”

**Hammers win FSGA event:** Boynton Beach residents Kevin and Alexa Hammer shot rounds of 65 and 68 for an 11-under 133 for a five-shot victory in last weekend’s FSGA Summer Mixed Team Championship at Mission Inn Resort & Club in Howey-on-the-Hills.

Alexa, who will begin classes at St. Andrews University in Scotland in September, and her father, who are members at Quail Ridge, carded 12 birdies against just one bogey.