

Tom Marzolf:

She encouraged us with her positiveness

BY THOMAS SKERNIVITZ

Tom Marzolf, the president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects, doesn't need a compass and protractor to draw two conclusions about his mother Rita.

She's the one who gave him a blueprint for success long before he became an architect. And she's the one who made sure that he didn't fall far from a family tree that this year is celebrating its golf centennial.

"When she would drop us off at school or at the golf course, she would always turn to me and say, 'Do your best. You're going to be a great person someday,'" Marzolf says. "She always encouraged us and was a very positive woman. She loved her kids and wanted us all to succeed and instilled a lot of confidence in us so that we could."

Much of the success that Tom would eventually enjoy would occur on the golf course, either as a player or designer. In high school he enjoyed a two handicap. Today, at 45, he's an architect with Fazio Golf Course Designers.

"My mother was really responsible for taking me, as a child, to the golf course every time I wanted to play," Marzolf says. "She'd take me back and forth to high school golf matches. And she'd always en-

courage me to play golf and help me really to have access to the game at a young age."

Rita Marzolf, now 74, excelled herself on the links. She learned the game as a member of the Columbus (Ohio) Country Club. That took her down the street to Ohio State University, where she starred on the women's golf team.

"She was a good long-iron player," Tom says. "And she was competitive. She played as much as she could, but she was a very active mother and raised five kids and sacrificed for her children. She gave up her pursuit of golf to raise a family."

Tom, an older brother, and three sisters were steeped in golf tradition, even before they ever picked up clubs. Great-grandfather Edward Marzolf was a superintendent in Buffalo, N.Y., in 1905. Grandfather Francis was good enough to enjoy a stint on the professional tour before becoming a coach at Ohio State and a club designer for McGregor Golf and Burke Golf. And their father Frank played at Notre Dame and was also a member at Columbus Country Club, where he met Rita Favret.

The family moved across the eastern half of the country, stopping in the Philadelphia and New York areas as well as Louisville, Ky. This allowed Rita and an attentive Tom to witness some of the

area LPGA stops.

"As a child we would go to LPGA golf events in the area just to introduce me to tournament golf," Tom says. "From my mom's college days at Ohio State, she knew Marilyn Smith, who played at Ohio State and in the '60s and '70s and was a competitive LPGA player. We would walk the course with Marilyn and I would get insights at an early age from an LPGA player."

The experiences paid off. After studying landscape and design at Virginia Tech, Tom joined Tom Fazio's group in 1983. From the time he designed his first course — Wade Hampton Golf Club in Cashiers, N.C. — his mother has never stopped paying great attention to his work.

"She loves her kids, all of us, and has a great interest in my career now," Tom says. "She's one of these doting mothers that every time there's an article in a golf magazine about a new opening of one of our courses, she's always buying extra copies of the magazine and sending it to me. She's just being a good mother and letting her kids know that she loves them."

Tom repaid his mother by moving her from Alexandria, Va., to Greenville, S.C., where he now resides. Together they'll celebrate 100 years of Marzolf golf during a family golf outing this summer. ■

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