

Golf world mourns loss of Herb Graffis



Herb Graffis

The golf world has been mourning the death of one of its greats, Herb Graffis, who founded the National Golf Foundation and the Golf Writers Association of America.

"In my book, he was the greatest man this industry will ever see," said Don Rossi, executive director of the Golf Course Builders Association and National Golf Car Manufacturers Association, in noting the passing of the famed golf writer-publisher Feb. 12 in Fort Myers, Fla.

"Herb Graffis' contributions to

golf can not be measured," said Dr. Joseph F. Beditz, executive vice president and acting president and CEO of the NGF.

Bob Rickey, executive secretary of the GWAA, added, "He was interested only in furtherance of the game of golf."

Rossi, who served as executive director of the National Golf Foundation from 1970-1984, said, "Graffis was the best friend I ever had in golf. From the day I took the job he acted as my godfather..."

"I talked with him at least twice a week for the past 10 years. He'd

'In my book, he was the greatest man this industry will ever see.'
— Don Rossi

guide me when I came up with a crazy idea."

Herb's brother, Joe, NGF president when it was Chicago-based, huddled every Tuesday with Rossi. "The greatest experience of my life was being associated with those

two," Rossi said. "When I was wrong they'd let me know. When I was right they were in my corner all the way," said Rossi.

"One of the last things we did together was a slogan. I sounded out Herb with 'Golf Makes America Beautiful.' He countered, 'No. Make that "Golf KEEPS America Beautiful."'"

That's now copyrighted by the USGA Green Section.

"When he founded the NGF he told the manufacturers, 'Golf's got to grow and you guys can help it grow.' The manufacturers taxed themselves on the shafts and golf balls. That funded the NGF for years," Rossi said.

"No one who ever knew Herb—and he knew everyone in golf—will ever forget him."

"Herb Graffis was a second father to me," said Rickey.

Graffis' golf writing led to his induction into the World Golf Hall of Fame in 1977, the first sports writer to be so honored. He also received the PGA of America's first-ever Distinguished Service Award in 1988.

Honors in abundance embarrassed Graffis. "It was almost impossible to compliment him," recalls Rickey.

Rickey cited their contacts in recent months as evidence of Graffis' intense devotion to all aspects of golf. Once weekly, Rickey would send Graffis a tape recording of the game's latest developments.

Graffis, legally blind, would reply by phone. His picturesque comments were as insightful as they were colorful. "Has anyone thought of doing this?" he'd venture, or "How does this sound?"

Almost to the day of his death, this frail, desperately ill gentleman was trying to contribute to the game he loved. His chief concern was how the game would fare perhaps 20 years after his death.

On a personal note, Rickey has especially poignant memories of Graffis. He grew up with Herb's son, Bill, like his dad a brilliant writer. Bill died at age of 50.

"My wife, Wanda, who died six days before Herb, was ailing. I didn't want Herb to find out and add to his worries, but someone, probably old golf writing pal Oscar Fraley, tipped Graffis. He'd call frequently to inquire, 'How's my girl?'"

The NGF honored Graffis in 1977 with creation of the Herb Graffis Award. It's presented annually to recognize "longtime and outstanding contributions in preserving the true spirit of the game; specifically as it was meant to be: for recreation, good fellowship and health.

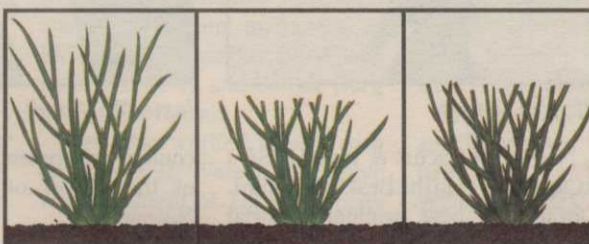
Graffis himself received the award in 1983.

Many major golf organizations, including the Golf Writers Association of America, which he founded and served as president, can trace their origins to Graffis' early spadework. His golf roots ran deeper than any man's, and spanned most of this century.

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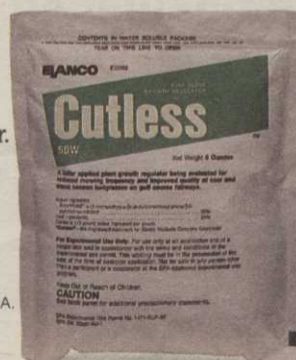
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