

Program for handicapped schoolchildren scores

Kids make Mr. Mac's retirement years golden

By Vern Putney

Retired phone worker George R. McGrory would brush aside mention that he must have a hot line to Heaven, but he'll beam affectionately when one of his golf pupils happily shouts, "Look, Mr. Mac!" after a good shot.

The North Palm Beach, Fla., resident has seen his weekly teaching program for handicapped kids mushroom from one grade school and nine students in September 1988, to eight schools and nearly 500 boys and girls.

Said McGrory: "We have seen tremendous changes in their outlook on life, school work and attitude toward other persons. They are aware that they can do some things with their lives and bodies once believed out of reach. They recognize that 'somebody cares.'"

That particular somebody is McGrory, who stashed his electronic equipment in his native Rhode Island a few years ago and made tracks for Florida and "the good golf life" in what Palm Beach County claims is the "Golf Capital of the World."

He found a better way to spend his "golden years." The world of the handicapped was awaiting a kind man with a warm heart. "Mr. Mac's Kids" are those with learning disabilities, cystic fibrosis, multiple sclerosis and other crippling diseases.

Barbara Blank, a teacher at Grove Elementary School in Palm Beach, planted the program idea in McGrory's mind.

How might she provide her autistic students something besides reading, writing and arithmetic? she inquired of McGrory.

McGrory suggested golf. A program was launched the next week. McGrory dug into his pocket to provide clubs, tees and balls.

Youngsters' handicaps range from learning and language disabilities, those wheelchair-bound and paralyzed from the waist down, to the mentally retarded.

They share a love for "Mr. Mac" and appreciation of volunteers he's lined up as the program has expanded.

Foremost is Dennis Walters. Walters in 1974 was a rising star headed for the professional tournament tour. Then a golf cart accident left him totally paralyzed from the waist down.

After months of hospitalization, agonizing therapy and rehabilitation, he returned to golf by cutting the legs off a bar stool and mounting it on a golf car. He's back in business in what has been called "Golf's Most Inspiring Hour" and is termed by Gary Player as "a great



Handicapped golfer Dennis Walters shows a class they can truly overcome their physical problems

example of skill, courage and determination for everyone in the world to see."

Walters, whose exhibition schedule from his Plantation, Fla., base spans the nation, squeezes in time for "Mr. Mac's Kids." He featured the recent Christmas party hosted by Moose Lodge #2010 and auxiliary of Palm Beach Gardens and attended by more than 300.

Kids astounded by Walters' trick shot magic truly believe "nothing is impossible." One must only believe and have faith.

Jan Beljan of North Palm Beach,

one of a handful of women golf course architects in the world and prominent in the kids' program, has her own grand design for the children's golf future.

"I'd like to help George attain his goal of a three-hole golf course for these special youngsters," she said, "and if I can, through my contacts across the country, scrounge old clubs that can be cut down for use, fine."

Meantime, McGrory will continue to apply his never-ending devotion to a great cause. Sure, at 64 he and wife Alice could be relaxing

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at the 19th hole of some club, sipping a cool one and savoring the so-called finer things.

Instead, they spend most Sunday afternoons washing clubs and golf balls at the kitchen sink as he

prepares for the week's instructional programs.

At Christmas time, the recipients of McGrory's generosity have a grateful hug for their year-round Santa and his unsung helpers.

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