

You can hear the passion in John David's raspy voice. He loves to talk about his golf game. But his is not the game that involves expensive titanium drivers and Polo sport shirts.

David's golf game is about helping youngsters lead accomplished lives. It's about potentially saving their lives. He is the president and executive director of the Minority Golf Association of America, a non-profit organization that performs golf clinics and educational programs for inner-city kids nationally.

The golf marketers will tell you that the game needs to draw more minorities and youngsters to garner higher returns for industry entrepreneurs. David has no problem with that, but he's recruiting minorities and youngsters to play golf for different reasons.

The boys and girls he recruits come from tough, crime-ridden, inner-city neighborhoods. They have a better chance of getting into trouble because of the environments they live in.

"They are at-risk socially, economically and academically," David says. "They may not graduate from school. They may end up going to jail."

David realizes that teaching troubled children how to putt is not going to change their lives socially. But his programs also feature educational sessions that emphasize personal dignity. It's the intangibles that MGAA teaches — self-discipline, academic achievement and values — that David believes can impress young lives.

The same characteristics that are necessary to succeed in golf — such as self-esteem and self-control — are not unlike those that are necessary to succeed in life, MGAA preaches. Kids are taught how to deal with frustration and criticism. They are instructed how to solve family problems at home. The kids are also told that the golf course industry can be a noble profession.

"We talk to them about career opportunities," he says. "We do seminars on golf course maintenance and caddying."

The 56-year-old David founded the MGAA in 1991 with his brother, Paul, in Westhampton Beach, N.Y. The "M" stands for minority, but skin color is not an issue. "They come in all colors," he says of the kids who participate.

Taking His Game to the Streets

BY LARRY AYLWARD



THE KIDS THAT
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David jokingly describes himself as "a mutt." He's African-American, Swedish, German, Jewish and American Indian. He says he's the perfect person to represent the multicultural MGAA, whose sponsors include Club Car, The Gillette Co. and Nicklaus Golf Equipment & Apparel.

David says people presume that most of the kids participating in MGAA activities are African-American. He's not angered by the assumption, but he's quick to point out that there are plenty of white kids in inner-city neighborhoods.

But he downplays any occurrences of racism. With the exception of a few golf course owners who turned skittish when approached about hosting clinics for inner-city youths, the MGAA has experienced no racial problems, he says. David, who recalls the days of the PGA limiting its membership to whites, would rather look ahead and hope for a leveling of racial barriers.

Even though he says MGAA is for all colors and creeds, David is proud that it has made an impact among minorities. His organization is in 25 states, and more than 125,000 kids have participated in the clinics. He cites research stating that the number of minorities participating in golf grew from less than 700,000 to more than 4 million from 1988 to 1995.

David will continue to polish his golf game. He's not finished with tearing down the stereotype that labels golf as a rich, white man's game. More importantly, there are youngsters who need his help. "I want to make the game more inclusive and universal for everyone," he says. "I want to create opportunities for kids."

But David needs your help and your open minds. And if you give the MGAA a chance, you'll be doing more than marketing golf. You could be helping to save lives.

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