

# *Here's to* Dad

## Six industry individuals pay tribute to the fathers who helped shape their lives

In honor of Father's Day on June 20, *Golfdom* salutes the dads of the many individuals — from greenkeepers to company CEOs — who comprise the golf course maintenance industry. In this special section from pages 24 through 36, Managing Editor Frank H. Andorka Jr. and Editor Larry Aylward asked six industry individuals to tell them how their fathers influenced them — in and outside of their careers. The six individuals featured in this section — Andrea Bakalyar, George Hamilton, Steve Mona, Larry Powell, Gregg Breningmeyer and Mike Hughes — all have earnest relationships with their fathers. *Golfdom* thanks them for sharing their stories.



# Andrea Bakalyar:

## *I Learned to Value Community and Service From My Dad*

BY FRANK H. ANDORKA JR.

**A**ndrea Bakalyar's voice rushes over the line with the wildness of raging river rapids, so quickly her listener must pause to catch his breath. Her joy as she describes her stepfather's gifts to her is electric — a jolt of warmth and love to the soul.

"Around the neighborhood, he's known as 'St. John' — though never to his face because he'd hate it," Bakalyar says, laughing. "He will help anyone at any time with anything. He's always been there for me when I needed him, and he taught me so much. He's been a great example of how to live."

Bakalyar, superintendent at the Wee Course at Williams Creek in Knoxville, Tenn., tells with evident relish of her father's first introduction into the world of golf course maintenance. The restless Bakalyar asked her father, John Merryman, if she could work on the neighboring golf course between shifts at the dairy farm where she grew up, a family operation since the 1800s.

Merryman considered the proposition for a moment. "I don't think they let girls work on golf courses, but you can try," he told Andrea, supporting her ambitions while trying to keep her hopes from being dashed if the course turned her down.

Little did John know then that his daughter would become a superintendent, one active in setting and advocating women's issues in a predominantly male industry. When she attended college for both teaching and nursing without settling on a career — and driving her mother to distraction ("Pick a career already," she remembers her mother saying in exasperation) — John calmed her fears.

"He told me I'd find the right thing for *me* eventually if I just followed my instincts," Bakalyar says. "You can't imagine how much his confidence in my decision-making ability meant. My parents never set limitations on me."

But his impact on her career runs far deeper than just support. On the dairy farm, Bakalyar absorbed lessons about commitment, hard work and responsibility. She watched

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EDWIN REIMSBERG

*Andrea Bakalyar and her father John Merryman*



# George Hamilton:

## *I Learned the Importance of Education From My Dad*

BY FRANK H. ANDORKA JR.

**J**oy, pride and pain intermingle in the silence on the other end of the phone. George Hamilton Jr. is trying to compose himself. He starts discussing that he thought his father, George Sr., would love his work as an assistant professor of turfgrass at Penn State University when he stops suddenly. A deep breath echoes, a voice catches and sobs resonate over the phone. Slowly, George Jr.'s voice returns.

"I'm sorry," he says, wiping tears away. "I miss him a lot, and hardly a day goes by when I don't think of him."

Hamilton exhales again and picks up the thread of the story where he'd left off. He says he wished his father had lived to see him get his doctorate and teach at Penn State, the school that overshadowed everything his father, a pro and superintendent at various golf courses throughout Delaware and Pennsylvania, did.

"He was above all a teacher," Hamilton says. "He took people under his wing and helped them learn the business. That's one of the reasons I became a teacher instead of a superintendent — to carry on that legacy. I hope the work I do is a testament to him."

Hamilton started hanging around the dirt-floored barn where his father worked after turning 6 years old. His father, talked turf to him in calm, quiet and unassuming tones. Those whispers snared Hamilton's heart for the industry by the time he turned 15.

In his own silent way, Hamilton's father also taught him valuable lessons about how to treat people. Whether it was an employee, a golfer or a fellow superintendent, George Sr. always treated people with respect and dignity.

"He always strove to be the consummate gentleman," Hamilton says. "He tipped his hat to everyone and said, 'Good morning,' cheerfully to everyone he met. He taught me to be kind to people and to help others. [Those were] his greatest gifts."

Though George Sr. never worked at what most people would consider a high-end club, Hamilton never heard him complain about lacking resources. When he needed a tool, he built it himself or adapted existing technology by adding his own innovations to accomplish his goal.

"That same philosophy drives my research," Hamilton says. "I build on the work of those who came before me,



*George Jr. and George Hamilton Sr.*

and I hope to leave something others can build on."

This year, Penn State honored father and son by establishing a scholarship and endowment fund in their names. The George W. Hamilton Sr. scholarship fund, established by George Jr. and his wife Becky with an initial endowment of \$25,000, will fund scholarships for undergraduate and certificate program students enrolled in the turfgrass science program. The George W. Hamilton Jr. fellowship, initially endowed at \$150,000 by an anonymous donor, will further the educations of a master's of science or doctoral student in turfgrass science.

"I learned the value of teaching young people from him, and it felt so good to give some of that back by naming the endowment after him," Hamilton says, his voice catching once again. "I take my job so seriously because of the commitment I learned from my dad — and I will be forever grateful for his guidance." ■



# Steve Mona:

## *If It Weren't My Dad, I Wouldn't be in the Career I'm in Today*

BY LARRY AYLWARD

It wasn't for his father, Steve Mona says he would not be the CEO of the GCSAA.

"He introduced me to golf," the 46-year-old Mona says of his dad, Frank. "I don't think I'd be in this position if it weren't for him having done that. I credit him for how I wound up in my career."

Frank introduced Steve to golf when he was 12. That's when the Mona family moved from New York to northern California. Frank joined the Castlewood Country Club in Pleasanton, Calif., where the Monas lived. Steve spent his summer days honing his game on the course.

"One of the main reasons my dad joined the course was to introduce us to golf," says Steve, who's the oldest of four children.

Frank, who turns 80 in July, still plays golf about four times a week in Palm Desert, Calif., where he lives. Steve says he and his father have played some memorable rounds together, including at Augusta National and Winged Foot Country Club.

The superintendents he represents respect Mona because he's so approachable. Mona says he learned that skill from his dad.

Steve remembers his father treating everyone with respect at Griffith Laboratories, the food seasoning manufacturer where he worked. His father had the top job at one of the company's facilities, but Steve says you never knew it.

"He had a great relationship with everybody," Steve says. "He treated everyone like they were the president of the company. I told myself, 'I have no business thinking that I'm better than anybody or my position is better than someone else's position.'"

Mona says his father led by example. He rarely sat Steve down and told him what he should do. He showed him through his actions. "That's how I picked up on a lot of things that are now part my character," Mona says.

His father's humility always impressed Steve, and he strives to live a modest life himself. "My dad hardly ever talked about himself," Mona says.

Mona says Frank held a demanding job, but he was a family man at heart. He wanted to be part of his children's lives.



*Frank and Steve Mona*

Steve remembers his dad taking him and his brother along when he played golf with his buddies at the club. He also remembers his dad's friends didn't bring their teen-age sons along. Steve remembers how proud he felt that his dad wanted him there.

"My dad was sending a message to me about his belief and confidence in me — and that he wanted to spend time with me," Steve says softly.

Mona says his father also taught him about work ethic. Steve says he doesn't remember his father ever missing a day of work.

Like father like son. Steve says he's missed one day of work in his 24-year career — and he went home sick at 4 p.m. ■



# Larry Powell:

## *My Dad Taught Me About Principles and Perseverance*

BY FRANK H. ANDORKA JR.

**L**arry Powell, superintendent of Clearview Golf Club in East Canton, Ohio, chooses his words carefully and deliberately. The words come in short bursts, separated by pauses as he decides how to discuss his father's legacy. His caution stems partly from the humility his parents instilled in him at an early age, but there's another factor at work. He realizes his father not only made significant contributions to him, but also to the entire industry. The historical importance of his father's role weighs on every word, and Larry clearly wants to get it right.

Powell's father, William, returned from World War II in 1946 to find the golf courses he scorched as the captain of Minerva (Ohio) High School's golf team closed to him because he was black. When he decided to build his own course in reaction, white banks in the town refused to loan him money for the project.

Still, William never allowed the struggles to kill his dream, so he built Clearview with private funds from two black doctors in the area. Larry says the resulting course remains the only black-built, black-owned golf courses in the country. The enormity of what his father endured to create the course impressed Larry, who says he grew up admiring the principles and perseverance that marked the struggle.

"My parents didn't shield me from what was going on in the business or in society," Powell says. "We had many discussions around the dinner table about the challenges we faced because of the color of our skin, but they also taught us not to accept the limitations of others. They taught us to persevere."

Larry Powell played golf by the time he was 5 or 6 years old. By the time he turned 8, he pushed a mower around the course. He watched his father care for the course and wondered how his father always seemed to know exactly what the course needed — almost as if it spoke to him.

"He taught me how to flow with nature instead of fighting it," Powell says. "His instincts about the course are usually right, and I've learned to trust myself the same way."

William, who worked a second job as a night security guard during the first 18 years after the course opened, also



*William and Larry Powell*

knew the importance of making every minute count. If he could think of new ways to do a task more efficiently, he did.

"I've tried to carry on his legacy of innovation," Powell says. "He was always willing to try new ways of doing things if it could save him time or money, even when other people told him he was crazy. He blazed his own trail."

But William bequeathed his son a far more human gift as well — the commitment to treat everyone equally, a lesson learned from the early struggles to build the course. Larry carries his father's vision forward with pride.

"He always told us to put ourselves in the other person's shoes before we acted," Larry says. "He never asked his employees to do something he wouldn't be willing to do himself, and he treated everyone with the same respect he expected from others. That's what I hope I'm carrying on today at the course." ■



# Gregg Breningmeyer:

## *Dad Taught Me to Maintain Integrity*

BY LARRY AYLWARD

**E**verette Breningmeyer taught his son Gregg plenty about living a worthy life. But one of Everett's teachings hit home more than the others with Gregg.

It focused on integrity.

"He taught me that you have to maintain integrity above all else," says Gregg, director of marketing and sales for John Deere Golf & Turf One Source. "If you lose your integrity, you lose everything."

Integrity is defined as a "firm adherence to a code or standard of values." Breningmeyer says his 74-year-old dad lives the definition.

Gregg, who grew up in Oak Park, Ill., is close to his father, even though they live apart (Gregg near Raleigh, N.C., and Everett near Atlanta). They speak weekly.

As a kid, Breningmeyer says he learned a few of life's lessons the hard way. That's because he might get himself into a jam and try to get himself out of it without owning up to being wrong. Everett, who still works as a psychologist, told his son that he had to fess up to his mistakes, no matter how difficult or embarrassing that was.

Gregg says he learned from his dad that it takes guts to admit you're wrong, but you feel better for it. "Then it's over, and you move on," he adds.

Integrity intertwines with credibility, Gregg believes, and credibility is about trust. In his relationships with distributors, Gregg realizes he needs their trust.

"If I don't have the trust of our distributors, One Source would never happen," Gregg says. "Our distributors must trust that we'll do what we say we're going to do."

Breningmeyer says his father also taught him it's vital to trust others to gain their respect. Gregg's philosophy is to trust the people he oversees and not micromanage them. "I let them do their jobs."

If you've ever met Breningmeyer, you know he's approachable. He's the type of guy who treats the janitor of a company with the same respect as the CEO. He's friendly and outgoing.

Breningmeyer says integrity pertains to self-esteem. He believes that an outgoing person is most likely a confident person.



*Gregg Breningmeyer (second from left) with his dad Everett (standing) and sons Josh (left) and Zac*

Interestingly, Everett, recognizing that his son was an extrovert, advised him to go into sales. Gregg couldn't thank him enough for that. "I love what I'm doing," he says convincingly.

Gregg's respect for his father is infinite. As the father of an 18-year-old son, Gregg jokes he can empathize with Everett about the challenges that come with raising a teen-ager.

"The older I get the more I appreciate him," Gregg says.

One thing is for: Like his dad did for him, Gregg will teach his son the value of integrity. He's already begun. ■



# Mike Hughes:

## *Dad Taught Me About Parental Support*

BY LARRY AYLWARD

In his early 30s, Mike Hughes announced he was chucking his career as a litigation lawyer and going back to school to earn a master's degree in sports management. Hughes sold his house and car, packed up with his pregnant wife and young daughter and moved to Athens, Ohio, to attend Ohio University.

"I went from having a substantial income to having zero income," Hughes says.

Needless to say, his decision floored some of Hughes' friends and family members. And then there was his dad, Arthur.

"My dad was extremely supportive of me," the 48-year-old Hughes says. "In fact, he was the most supportive person of all the people around me. It meant a lot."

His father's reaction taught Hughes the importance of

parental support. Arthur knew Mike was tired of the law business after 10 years and wanted to pursue his dream, which was to work in the golf business.

"He was really encouraged by the fact that I wasn't going to accept less than something that I really wanted to do," Mike says.

Mike wasn't surprised of his father's reaction. His dad was always in his and his twin brother's corners growing up in Charleston, S.C.

"He would always tell us, 'Whatever you want to do, you can do,'" Hughes remembers. "He'd say it was just a matter of applying ourselves. He was always supportive and proud of us when we achieved anything."

That includes when Hughes was named executive director of the fledgling National Golf Course Owners

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*Mike Hughes (standing, right) with father Arthur and twin brother Arthur*

Association (NGCOA) in 1990. Hughes was the first full-time employee the association hired.

The NGCOA, located in Charleston, unveiled its new headquarters a few years ago, and Arthur was there to celebrate the day with his son.

"Parental support makes a difference," Hughes says. "I don't think people ever outgrow it."

Hughes has three children — two girls ages 17 and 14, and a 13-year-old boy. Like his father, Hughes strives to encourage to his children. "I support them and let them know that they have the capabilities to follow their dreams," he says.

It's vital that parents instill confidence in their children by supporting their endeavors, Hughes says. "It makes them want to try things that they might not otherwise want to do," he adds.

Arthur is a World War II veteran. A member of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne, he was wounded in Holland and sent to England to recover. A few weeks later, he participated in the famous Battle of the Bulge.

"He's a tough guy, but he's a nice guy, too," Hughes says. "He's very gentle on the outside."

After retiring from the military, Arthur worked for the civil service at the naval supply center in Charleston. He lives alone in the same house where he raised his family, about 15 minutes from Mike. Father and son see each other often and speak regularly. ■

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her father rise daily to milk the cows at 5:30 a.m. When she says daily, she means *every* day.

"He never took a day off sick that I can remember," Bakalyar recalls. "He expected the same from his children, and we followed him into the barns as soon as we were able. I learned you should be productive every minute, and his amazing work ethic inspired me."

It wasn't always work, however. Andrea says her dad also showed her how to enjoy life.

"He knew when to play," Bakalyar says. "Dad always had time for the kids."

John's community involvement, however, stands as the lesson Bakalyar holds nearest to her heart. He opens his workshop to anyone with a project to do. He's a church councilman and resident caretaker for the congregation next door. He plows the neighborhood without payment when it snows.

Everyone knows John in Upperco, Md., and they genuinely *like* him. Bakalyar watched her father create a network of friends with his love and kindness that serves him to this day as a support system during difficult times. She vows to do the same in her life.

"When you grow up in that environment, it leaves a strong

*"My father strives each day to be a little bit better than he was before. That's the kind of legacy I want to leave, too."*

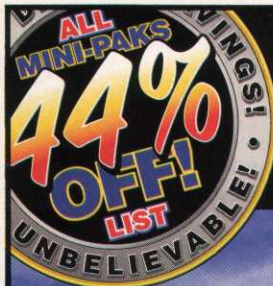
*Andrea Bakalyar*

impression," Bakalyar says. "You learn that you shouldn't do for others with the expectation of something in return. You should serve others because it's the right thing to do, and they will often return that kindness in most unexpected ways."

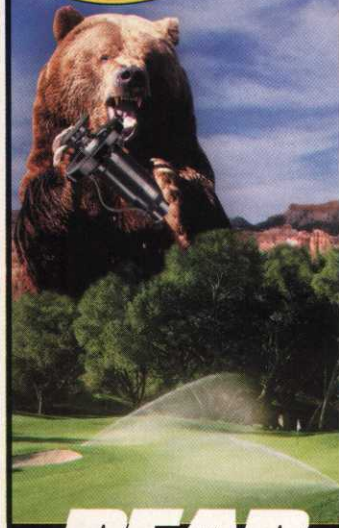
"My father strives each day to be a little bit better than he was before," Bakalyar says warmly. "That's the kind of legacy I want to leave, too." ■

#### Tell Us About Your Dad

Golfdom would like to know a story about how your dad influenced you to be the person you are. Send an e-mail to Editor Larry Aylward at [laylward@advanstar.com](mailto:laylward@advanstar.com) to share your story. We'll print responses in either the magazine or online.



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