

Mamas' Boys

Six industry men pay tribute to the mothers who helped shape their lives

There's an old Jewish proverb that says, "God could not be everywhere, so he therefore made mothers."

In honor of Mother's Day on May 8, *Golfdom* salutes the moms of the many individuals — from superintendents to owners — who comprise the golf industry. In this special section from pages 26 through 38, Editor in Chief Larry Aylward and Managing Editor Thomas Skernivitz ask seven industry men to tell them how their mothers influenced them — in and outside of their careers. The men featured in this section — Matt Shaffer, Tim O'Neill, Jim Nicol, Michael and Vinny Iacono, Tom Marzolf and Bill Leeke — all are self-proclaimed mamas' boys who have earnest relationships with their mothers. *Golfdom* thanks them for sharing their stories.

Matt Shaffer:

Mom provided me a life form

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR IN CHIEF

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here are so many critical things his mother taught him about how to live a meaningful life, says Matt Shaffer, that it's difficult to remember them all. That said, the soft-spoken and gentlemanly Shaffer, the superintendent of Merion Golf Club, has much in common with his 87-year-old mother Miriam.

"[She provided me] a life form," Shaffer says of their relationship.

Shaffer grew up in the kind of small town that John Mellencamp sings about in his heartfelt tune of the same name. If Shaffer could add a verse to the song, it would be in tribute to his mother, who still lives in the town of Martinsburg, Pa., population 2,500.

Shaffer, 52, is the youngest of four children. He has two sisters and a brother. He says his mother and father, Luther, provided him and his siblings with a "real strong home life." Shaffer credits his parents with providing "the foundation" of his life.

Miriam was a stay-at-home mom. Matt says one of his earliest memories of his mother is how loving and devoted she was to tending to him when he was ill.

"I was sick a lot when I was kid with severe asthma

and allergies," he says. "She took really good care of me."

Matt also remembers that Miriam was strict and forthright, which garnered her kids' respect.

"My mom is not a very big person, but we towed the line when she talked," Shaffer says.

There was nothing fancy about his upbringing, says Shaffer, who was raised as a Mennonite. His mother placed a major focus, however, on living by the golden rule. "Treat people like you want to be treated," Shaffer says.

Shaffer probably never would have wanted to be a golf course superintendent — and work 12 hours a day during the playing season and not take many days off — if he didn't have a strong work ethic. He doesn't remember his mother drilling it into his mind that he had to work hard to succeed. She took a more subtle approach while planting the seed that hard work and commitment to finish the things you started will get you to a lot of places in life.

"She would say, 'Before you go hunting, you have to finish your chores,'" Shaffer says. "It was an unwritten thing. And you didn't challenge her because you didn't mind doing your chores."

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Matt Shaffer and his mother Miriam. "She encouraged me to be an adventurer," Matt says.



PHOTO BY: GERALD T. LEIDY

Tim O'Neill:

She was there as I climbed GCSAA ladder

BY THOMAS SKERNIVITZ, MANAGING EDITOR

Talk about sudden impact: Even before Tim O'Neill could be formally announced as the new president of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, he was helping to rewrite the group's record books.

With O'Neill's parents, seven brothers and sisters, a few aunts and uncles and most of his colleagues from the Country Club of Darien (Conn.) in attendance, the Golf Industry Show attracted nearly 23,000 people.

"We were definitely responsible for improving the numbers this year at the show," O'Neill says jokingly.

None of the contingent was as proud as O'Neill's mother Joan.

"She's come to the last couple of shows as I've moved closer to becoming president," her son says. "I don't know how many mothers were at the Golf Industry Show, but mine was there."

Thirty years ago, that might have embarrassed O'Neill. But at age 47, with a wife (Jennifer) and two children (Justin, 16, and Kristen, 13), he says it's "always a thrill" to share a moment with mom.

"I'm at the age now where I'm a parent with teenagers, so I understand when my kids want me to walk about four

Joan O'Neill attended the Golf Industry Show to watch her son Tim be named GCSAA president.



feet behind them as we're walking through the mall," O'Neill says. "But I'm also at the stage — and I've been at this stage for a long time in life, actually — that I really appreciate what a mother's all about and what a mother means to you. I cherish the moment and I feel real fortunate that I was able to show my mother firsthand a little bit about what I've been into professionally for a bunch of years."

Not that Joan is new to golf. Husband Vincent is a big fan of the sport — "a lot of my mom's heroes are my dad's heroes," Tim says — and that carried over to Tim and his three brothers.

"She put up with a lot of Saturday and Sunday afternoons watching golf," O'Neill says. "She had her hands full with all of us. ... She would argue (now) that she was a golfer before she started hav-

ing kids, but she had eight kids in 10 years, so there wasn't a lot of golfing going on during that period right there."

O'Neill grew up in Rhode Island, where his parents and several of his siblings still reside. At age 19 he started as the assistant superintendent at the Greenwich (Conn.) Country Club. Only three years later he was named the third superintendent in the history of Darien, which had been founded in 1957.

"I knew what I wanted to do at an early age," O'Neill says, "and she gave me all the freedom in the world to pursue being a golf course superintendent."

"My mom means an awful lot to me. And for that I'm extremely grateful and certainly thrilled that, in becoming president, I was able to share that with my mother." ■

"... I really appreciate what a mother's all about and what a mother means to you."

TIM O'NEILL

PHOTO COURTESY: TIM O'NEILL

Jim Nicol:

I always had a special bond with my mom

BY LARRY AYLWARD

Marguerite Nicol was a meticulous mother who ran a tight ship when it came to managing her family's household in St. Cloud, Minn. Marguerite had four children, including Jim Nicol, her third-born child, who grew up to be the certified superintendent of Hazeltine National Golf Club in Chaska, Minn.

"I never remember our house being messy," Jim says. "My mother was a true homemaker. The windows were always clean and she made sure we were always dressed properly. We wore impeccably pressed shirts to school every day."

Not all the kids inherited their mother's spick-and-span gene, but Jim did. And that's a blessing for Jim, who has used that ability to tidy up the greens, tees and fairways that comprise his prized course, which hosted the PGA Championship in 2002 and will host it again in 2009.

"I'm a neat person," says the 53-year-old Nicol, in his ninth year at Hazeltine. "I always have shined shoes and clean clothes. I got that from her."

Marguerite, who grew up on a North Dakota farm, turns 85 this month and still lives in St. Cloud with her husband, Bob, who turned 90 in April. Marguerite is a

young 85, however, and even plays a little golf. (Bob is also very active.)

"I hope *that's* in the genes," Jim says of his parents' spryness.

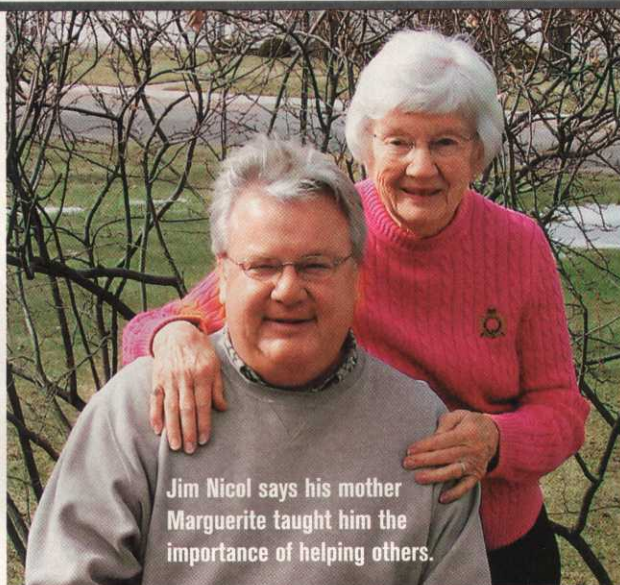
Jim says he always felt a special bond with his mother when growing up and still does. He could tell her about most anything on his mind and trust her to understand his problems. "I was close to my dad, too," Jim says, "but not like I was close to my mother."

Jim says his mom has a big heart and showed him how important it is to help others in need. When he was a child, Jim recalls a neighbor giving birth to triplets. The other moms in the neighborhood, including Marguerite, chipped in to buy the woman, Mrs. Jennings, a new clothes dryer.

"And they would go over her house every morning and every afternoon to fold diapers and drink coffee," Jim says.

Marguerite also taught Jim to be courteous and tolerant of others. For instance, Jim says he never called his parents' friends by their first names, although his friends' kids refer to him by his first name. "I don't mind it," Jim adds. "It's just a different generation."

Anybody who knows Jim knows he often takes a no-nonsense approach to certain matters and is not afraid to



Jim Nicol says his mother Marguerite taught him the importance of helping others.

express his opinion, even if it's unpopular. Jim says he acquired that distinction from his mother. "She's quiet, but she's very strong," he says.

Thanks in part to his mother, Jim says he lived a charmed childhood. It was a bit regimented and predictable but joyful nevertheless.

"We'd get up every morning and have breakfast," Jim says. "And mom would pack lunches. Then we'd go off to school."

The kids played after school, had dinner, did their homework (often with their mother's help) and went to bed. "We never stayed up late," Jim says.

Marguerite often prepared full sit-down dinners complete with dessert. Nicol says his mother is a terrific cook and baker. In fact, some of Nicol's fondest childhood memories

are raiding the freezer for his mom's special-recipe chocolate-chip cookies. Did any of his mother's cooking prowess rub off on him? "No, it just made me heavy," Jim says.

Jim is proud to call his mom a "true homemaker." That said, Jim says that full-time motherhood is a lost art these days because so many mothers have been forced into the workforce to help pay their families' bills.

"I don't begrudge women for working today, but it has made a difference in our society," he says.

Jim is thankful for himself and his siblings that Marguerite was at the center of their lives while they were growing up. She still is, says Jim, who sees his parents at least once every two weeks.

"She means the world to me," he says. ■

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. ■

"She loved her kids and wanted us all to succeed and instilled a lot of confidence in us so that we could."

TOM MARZOLF

Bill Leeke:

Mom taught me the A-B-Cs of business

BY THOMAS SKERNIVITZ

Since taking over management of his mom's golf course last year, Bill Leeke has watched his favorite semi-retiree enjoy her share of red-letter off days. Tops, thus far, among the R&R moments has been Nov. 20, when Meriam Bailey Leeke finally got the "N" she had deserved 47 years earlier.

Along with 51 other female athletes who had represented Northwestern University, Meriam Bailey Leeke, a star golfer at the school in the 1950s, belatedly received a varsity letter that day. Her son and 23,000 other spectators watched the ceremony during halftime of Northwestern's football game.

"Women athletes at the time my mother played were never recognized," says Bill, the director of operations at Old Channel Trail Golf Course in Montague, Mich. "It was great to see her and her counterparts finally get the kudos they deserved."

As a student at Northwestern, Meriam Bailey was among a small group of women who studied business. Even fewer females participated in national athletic events, as Title IX, the first comprehensive federal law to prohibit sex discrimination against students and employees of educational institutions,

was many years shy of inception.

Yet Meriam excelled in the classroom and on the golf course. As the Chicago District and Illinois State amateur champion in 1956, she followed those victories by winning both the National Intercollegiate and Western Amateur in 1957. She also played in three straight U.S. Women's National Opens, making the cuts for the final 36-hole rounds each time.

She was a member of the 1958 U.S. Curtis Cup Team and played competitive golf for several years until she married Lyle Leeke in 1960. They moved to Germany, where Lyle headed an engineering crew for the Army. "She decided to have a family instead of going pro," Bill says.

Lyle and Meriam moved to Montague in 1964 to assume management of Old Channel Trail, then a nine-hole facility designed by Robert Bruce Harris and built in 1927 by Meriam's grandfather, H.O. Bailey. They expanded the facility over the years, raised their son Bill, and ran the course together until Lyle's death in 1990. "She's very successful — a good example, a good role model," Bill says.

Meriam was a director on



Bill Leeke (top) is proud that his mother was finally recognized for her golfing achievements while at Northwestern.

Bill, who played golf for Northwestern in 1988 and '89, said growing up on a golf course was a "unique experience." Before returning to Montague, he spent 15 years in Chicago operating a computer consulting business that he still oversees.

"My mother taught me a lot on the golf course," he says. "How to stay cool under pressure, how to think through challenges, how to be strategic. She's done a great job taking care of and expanding the course while also pursuing her own activities." ■

several bank boards, including the corporate board of First Michigan Bank (FMB). She served as a trustee on several college boards and charitable foundations and is the treasurer of the National Golf Course Owners Association. With Bill and his wife Heather now running the course, she spends more time traveling and last summer visited England to participate in a Curtis Cup reunion.

Michael & Vinny Iacono:

Whatever it took for her sons ... she did it

BY LARRY AYLWARD

The two brothers — their eyes wide and smiles bright — beam when they talk about their mother.

"She's always been a rock to me," says 43-year-old Vinny Iacono, the younger brother and superintendent of the Blue Hill Country Club in Canton, Mass.

"She's genuine," says 49-year-old

Michael Iacono, the older brother and certified superintendent of Pine Brook Country Club in Weston, Mass.

Michael and Vinny, who tend turf at two of the Boston area's most exclusive country clubs, say their mother, 75-year-old Pat, taught them how to be strong and not waver in their beliefs.

"She was just a strong person," Vinny says. "She would never let anything on the outside influence her beliefs."

His mother's genuineness, Michael says, reminded him of Edith Bunker from "All in the Family." Not that Pat was a dingbat, Michael says with a chuckle, but she was patient and honest like Edith, who was credited as the glue that held the Bunkers together.

A large part of Michael's and Vinny's jobs at their respective clubs is dealing with members. As any wise superintendent knows, the key to solid communication with members is candidness.

"We do well in our positions because we speak to our members with honesty," Michael says. "We don't BS. That came from her."

Pat's honesty was not only inspiring, it was persuasive, Michael and Vinny say. It made them think twice about behaving badly. And when they faltered occasionally and made bad decisions, they only hoped she would never find out. Because if Pat did find out, Michael and Vinny felt that much worse about what they did because they had disappointed



Michael (left) and Vinny love to talk about their mother, Pat.

their mother.

But even if they did disappoint her,

Vinny says, she always tried to understand why they made the wrong choices.

"She would always be there in a caring way," Vinny says contemplatively. "She gave you a pat on the back and a hug. She didn't make you feel like a loser."

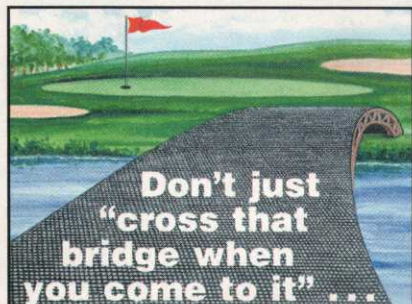
The Iaconos, of Italian heritage, grew up in Providence, R.I. Michael and Vinny lost their father, who was a superintendent, when they were in their 20s. Pat was 52 when her husband, Vincent, died.

The boys spent a lot of time with their mother when they were younger because their father worked long hours and many weekends. Michael and Vinny admit their mother doted over them. They didn't have many chores and she cooked them whatever they wanted to eat.

"We were mamas' boys," Vinny says.

Michael and Vinny learned the value of hard work from both parents. The

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Shaffer

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Shaffer is confident in his abilities as a superintendent, something he attributes to his mother.

"She encouraged me to be an adventurer," Shaffer says. "She knew I couldn't stand to be in the valley, and I had to go to the top of the mountain to see what was on the other side."

Shaffer says his mom also taught him about humility. "She instilled in me that it's not important to boast."

The most important thing his mother taught him, Shaffer says, was the ability to forgive others for their mistakes. Shaffer says he never holds a grudge.

"I could have a big blowout with someone and an hour or two later I'll go up that person and say, 'Hopefully that's behind us and we can move forward,'" he says.

Miriam told Matt that forgiving oth-

ers goes hand in hand with being at peace with oneself. Hence, Matt has found it easy to forgive.

"If you're full of malice and you're bitter . . . well that just fosters ill feelings, which doesn't make you happy," Shaffer says. "And then ultimately you're just a miserable individual. And that's no fun."

Shaffer likes to think he lives an honest life, and he attributes much of that to his mother's influence. "I remember her saying, 'God is watching and He has a good memory,'" he says.

People who know Shaffer know he's a pleasant person to be around. Shaffer says that comes from his mom, too. She has the gift of gab — in a good way — and is an engaging conversationalist.

"She can talk to anybody," Shaffer says. "Today when I stand in front of an audience and give a speech, I'm nervous initially. But then I settle in like we are having a friendly conversation."

Miriam also taught Matt and his sib-

lings to read, as in novels and plenty of them. Shaffer says he reads about 50 books a year.

"We're all voracious readers," he says of his family members.

If there's one regret, it's that Shaffer doesn't see his mother and father enough. He lives about a five-hour drive from his hometown and sees his parents about seven times a year.

"I can't get home enough," he says. ■

Iacono

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family operated a small farm when they were young. The brothers remember their mother working on the farm, sometimes for 12 hours a day and in the hot sun.

"It was work that nobody should have to do," Michael says.

Pat loved school. And despite only making it through the eighth grade because she had to go work for the family when she was a teenager, she championed the importance of an education. Michael, who graduated from Providence College, says his mother instilled him with the value of continued education. "It's why I became a certified superintendent," he says.

Vinny says he was the weaker student of the two brothers. "But all through school mom was the one sitting beside me and helping me with my homework," he adds.

Pat lives in a retirement community in Providence. Her boys stop by to see her as often as they can.

"She's had a tough life, and it was never easy," Michael says. "But she smiles every day."

The two brothers love to talk about their mother. The way they speak of her — what she has taught them and given them — is indicative of their ongoing appreciation for her.

"Whatever it took for her sons . . . she did it," Michael says. "And she still does." ■

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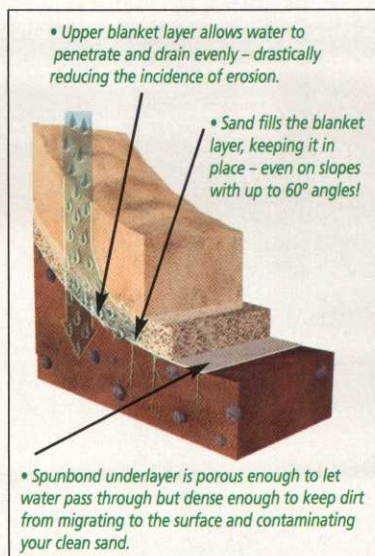
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