

# Bill Leeke:

## Mom taught me the A-B-Cs of business

BY THOMAS SKERNIVITZ

**S**ince 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.