

Donald Ross Award Speech, April 2013

Thank you, Bob, for that introduction. Members of the ASGCA and guests, it is an honor for me to stand here tonight as the 38th recipient of the Donald Ross Award. Many of you may know that my father was the first recipient, in 1976, and that he and Donald Ross were among the 14 founding members of the ASGCA in 1946. Today there are 175 members.

I was lucky to be born into the business but I know that I wouldn't be here without my talented associates: Keith Evans, now retired, who worked at Rees Jones Inc. for 33 years; and the current team of Greg Muirhead (29 years); Steve Weisser (22 years); and Bryce Swanson (13 years). I also had a great construction team: Austin Gibson and Clyde Hall among others...and who could ever forget Bill Baldwin, my father's foreman, who taught me the business literally from the ground up, 50-some years ago when I was fresh out of school. Roger Rulewich and Cabell Robinson were at RTJ at the time, and the three of us worked side by side, learning from each other, for the 10 years that I worked there.

I believed that golf course architecture is a craft, something that one learns by doing. When I started out at Robert Trent Jones, Inc. in 1965, I made my share of mistakes. But fortunately I made them in my *father's* name! (He's probably looking down right now with that famous grin on his face!)

But I'll go back a few years:

I had my first job in golf when I was 12. My father gave me the assignment of measuring the drives during the 1954 U.S. Open at Baltusrol. It was so exciting to be inside the ropes, to be so close to the players as they fashioned their shots. I was hooked. That was when I knew I wanted to design golf courses, especially courses where major tournaments were played. I had been born into golf...indoctrinated, you might say. Golf was part of my daily life. It's all we talked about in our household. But *tournament* golf! Now that's the *real* excitement.

The first U.S. Open I ever attended was in 1950. I was eight and I think the only reason I went with my parents was that we had family friends who were members and lived near the course. I think they took us boys along because they didn't have a babysitter! It was in the time that a spectator could actually meet the players. I was so close to the action that I am in the photograph of Hogan, Fazio, and Mangram holding the trophy before the playoff. Pretty heady stuff.

In 1955, I went with my parents to the Open at Olympic. I stood on top of a station wagon and watched Jack Fleck make the putt to tie Ben Hogan (Fleck won the playoff). I think I've only missed a dozen Opens in my lifetime.

A turning point for our family was the Open at Oakland Hills in 1951. My father has been hired to rehab the course and make it tougher for the pros, and indeed it was. That was where Hogan

made his famous comment to my mother that if her husband had to play his own courses for a living, she would be in the bread line! But the press coverage of this event catapulted my father's career, and the profession of golf course architecture in general. Finally, being a golf course architect became an increasingly noteworthy endeavor. (Luckily for my father, my grandfather was still alive to see my father's career take off because when Dad and Mother were married in 1934, he sat Dad down and glowered, "I've never even heard of golf course architecture. How are you ever going to make enough money to support my daughter?") Dad's probably grinning about this too.

These experiences, along with the advent of televised tournaments, made me want to be part of all that excitement.

By 1985, my own firm had been chugging along for 11 years with enough jobs to keep us busy. (In fact, I travelled so much that my wife says even though we've been married 45 years, I was away so much it only seems like 20!) But, when The Country Club in Brookline called me in 1985 to restore that great old course in preparation for the 1988 U.S. Open, it was really a dream come true for me. I believe that I got that job because I understood the history of the game. And that job did for *my* career what Oakland Hills had done for my father's.

I did learn one very important thing. After any Open is over, the course must be able to transition "back to normal" and the members must be able to enjoy an everyday round of golf.

Another thing that I have learned over the years is that I am *still* learning. I have no intention of preaching to the choir, but I can't resist sharing a few random tidbits:

- You need a thick skin, especially if you do championship work
- You need people skills as well as design skills
- I think everyone in this room understands the importance of designing for the client's objectives, whether it's for everyday play or a championship test, or both. The client is happy when the people that play the course are happy. Someone recently asked Pete Dye how he knew when he had it right and he answered, "When the pros hate it and the members love it!" The questions I ask myself are: Is it playable? Is it fun? Is it challenging?
- The game is played mostly by *average* golfers. That's who we should all design for.
- There are *trends* in golf course design, not unlike fashion. And like fashion, some fads are better than others.
- The healthier the golf industry, the better we all do. It behooves us to design to strengthen the game, whether it means more judicious locations of sand and water hazards, wide fairways, playable rough, or more closely-mowed areas around the greens.
- I believe we should promote the *value* of the game. What better place to get exercise, unplug from your iPhone and communicate with your friends in a real conversation, and enjoy the outdoors and fresh air? Maybe even cut a business deal in the process. And you

can play golf from childhood into advancing old age. I can't think of another sport that offers the same.

People often ask what I consider to be my most important contribution to the game. I immediately think of the two publicly-owned courses that are redesigned to U.S. Open-worthy standards, Bethpage Black and Torrey Pines South. Bethpage in 2002 was especially thrilling to attend: the first public course to host an Open, only miles from New York City post 9/11, the tremendous enthusiasm of the fans, Tiger's popular win...it doesn't get much better than that. Torrey Pines had the most riveting competition of any Open I have ever attended. These two events brought record numbers of new fans to championship golf, which has boosted interest in the game. In both cases, I loved seeing how our design influenced the outcome.

As for the future of golf course design, I think the advances in equipment have changed the game and changed our thinking about the designs we do. We have had to adapt and, in fact, it has created a lot of jobs for a lot of us. But now there's a line in the sand, so that the work of lengthening courses will probably wane.

I just know that we need to grow the game. We need to make our courses more fun to play, because we need a new generation of golf nuts. I'm already working on my grandchildren.

Who knows what the future will bring? There are so many variables: the economy, social changes, environmental factors.

Whatever the future brings, I'm just happy to be doing what I love.

I'd like to close by saying how important the ASGCA is to me. I've been a member since 1968 - 45 years - before many of you were born! There were only 43 members then, and we mostly talked golf and played golf. I enjoyed it then, but now I am also proud of the level of professionalism created through the years, starting with the executive directorship of Paul Fullmer in 1970 and continued by Chad Ritterbusch today. It is a wonderful fraternity of people who gather to improve our profession through workshops and panels and informal discussion. I've watched many of you grow from being fledgling architects to being noteworthy designers in your own right. While we don't all think alike - we have different styles, different experiences - we learn from each other. We assist one another. We applaud each other's achievements. Receiving this award and being honored by my peers is a milestone in my life. Thank you.