

An Honor to Play with Veterans & Patriots at the CC of Gwinnett outside of Atlanta!

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Even though our scores don't always reflect it, things usually work out in golf!

Whenever Andy's Golf & Travel Diary travels to Atlanta a great golf outing at a great golf course always seems to present itself!

Definitely so on the people side of golf if you know a guy like Bob Thibodeau! Bob is well established in the Atlanta golf community as the Veterans Outreach Director at the Adaptive Golf Association with ties to the Georgia State Golf Association. A Vietnam Veteran himself it was an honor to play with him and a Veterans Play Group on Patriot Golf Day—Labor Day Monday—at the Country Club of Gwinnett just outside of Atlanta!



Most golfers are aware of Patriot Golf Day. A fundraising day of golf to support the FOLDS of HONOR scholarships and PGA HOPE.



What an honor to tee it up with these Veterans on Patriot Golf Day!

Those FOLDS of HONOR scholarships to spouses and children of America's fallen and disabled members of the Military Service number 3,802 this year and total 28,000 since 2007 when Lieutenant Colonel Dan Rooney started the charitable organization. One fateful day he was on a commercial flight that landed with the pilot requesting all passengers to remain seated until they first removed the casket of a fallen soldier. Dan watched as the deceased's twin brother walked somberly alongside the flag-covered casket to meet his family including a young son. Over half the passengers could not be bothered and disrespectfully got up and

walked off the plane without acknowledging the tribute. The Folds of Honor Foundation; a 501C-3 nonprofit organization, was born that day and their motto says it best—"Honor Their Sacrifice. Educate Their Legacy."

PGA 'HOPE' which stands for "Helping Our Patriots Everywhere," is the flagship military program of PGA REACH, the charitable foundation of the PGA of America. PGA HOPE introduces golf to Veterans with disabilities to enhance their physical, mental, social and emotional well-being.

According to the PGA of America's website, the program introduces the game of golf through a developmental 6-to-8 week curriculum, taught by PGA Professionals trained in adaptive golf and

military cultural competency. All programs are funded by PGA REACH and supplemented by PGA Section Foundations, so the cost of programming is free to all Veterans.

But what happens after a veteran completes the PGA of America programs? Once introduced to the game of golf, where do veterans with disabilities play the game in a way that maintains or improves their health? That's where Bob Thibodeau comes into the picture. Bob T. or Mr. T as I like to say, worked with lots of folks earlier in the year to make the Veterans' Play Group a reality at the CC of Gwinnett. This group included L&J Acquisitions, the owners of the CC of Gwinnett; the club's General Manager Doug Cartin and Heidi Mitchell, LPGA /Adaptive Golf Instructor. Bob also teamed up with the veterans themselves including Tony the leader of the Veterans' Play Group at Gwinnett and Don, a fully disabled veteran who we teed it up with on Patriot Golf Day.



Don was and is our rock!

The informal outing, spirited scramble format, and par-3 proximity competitions were all pretty normal except some of the guys had pieces of titanium where I have flesh. There was definitely a patriotic spirit present, lots of camaraderie and some good golf too!

The CC of Gwinnett was the first Steve Melnyk design I have ever played and I liked it very much. The first nine meanders upward from the clubhouse out-and-back in a clockwise manner on beautiful slightly sloping golf land! On the first, a short risk-reward par-4, I took the risk with no reward while Don layed up short of the creek and pitched a nice one onto the green. I was fortunate to make the 30-footer and we were off to a great start!



Beautiful lake! Beautiful vistas! Has the East Lake flair about it in terms of beauty, history, & golfing traditions!

There are many memorable holes on Melnyk's Masterpiece; as memorable as his United States and British Amateur Championships! Though he played in 19 Majors and 335 PGA TOUR events, Melnyk never won on tour though he parlayed that experience into a notable golf broadcaster for 22 years with CBS Sports, ABC Sports and ESPN. He even had the nickname of Jim Furyk's caddie Mike Cowan before he did. The memorable holes to me are the short downhill par-4 4th hole (they can't all be uphill) with a distinctive hedge behind the green and the uphill par-3 6th hole which has Georgia rock outcroppings short

and long of the green. Especially challenging with a left hole location as it was on the day we labored on holiday around the CC of Gwinnett! I also found the intact stone fireplace with missing house an interesting curiosity on the left side of the 7th fairway.

A large lake divides the first and second nine. I am curious if the lake was part of the golf course design or created previously though I was unable to reach Steve for comment. While within 10 miles of Stone Mountain and with rock outcroppings to prove it, the lake and Melnyk's counterclockwise routing around it with the 13th, 14th, and 15th holes stacked on the far side reminded me of East Lake Golf Club which is another 10 miles past Stone Mountain to the West.

While it is the type of golf course where you remember all the holes, the memorable ones to me

on the second nine include the par-4 12th where the tee shot needs to be layed up short of an inlet from the lake and the par-3 16th hole with an elevated tee shot to the green defined short, left, and beyond by lake water! Great design throughout and in great condition too!



With Doug Cartin and Bob Thobodeau (center)!



Heidi is a LPGA world class teaching phenomenon!

I love, respect, and honor all women and men that serve in our military. My older brother David was a Navy ROTC officer and served during the Vietnam War. It wasn't until later in his life that my father shared the details of his military service during World War II. He lost his brother Paul in the war and suffered like so many even after he returned home victoriously. We all know a veteran and that patriotic feeling if not oneself a veteran then from someone close to you. Veterans are memorialized by war while at times also immobilized spiritually, emotionally, mentally and/or physically. The reality is that most

wounds of war are unseen. That is why it is good for veterans to get up and get out with other veterans. Also why it is good for us nonmilitary to be around veterans disabled or not to show our gratitude for their service to us and our country and to share some good times in a country that they protect and preserve!

During my ongoing 13 years on tour the single most impactful moment to me happened on Saturday, July 4th at the Congressional CC during the 2009 AT&T National. I was working the last group as David Feherty's cart driver. It is an easy job since he walks most of the time and drinks little water during the round. But on the 17th hole he told me to go up to the 18th tee and make sure "the guy in the wheelchair was ready to go." The guy was Army Spc. Brendan Marrocco, who less than four months earlier had lost all four of his limbs to an Improvised Explosive Device in Iraq, was "ready to go." After the players teed off, Tiger Woods came over and gave him a "fist bump" and then David Feherty wheeled the disabled veteran down the 18th fairway ahead of the golfers. There was tremendous applause from the gallery. Marricci had come home to an appreciative country!

People, all people, including disabled veterans just want to be treated same as we like to be treated; as a human being, different yet no different; diverse, yet the same on the golf course and with camaraderie... drives, irons and putts... the ball does not know who swings the club; why should we care? Let's enjoy the game and the camaraderie especially on Patriot Golf Day!

Oh by the way, Steve Melnyk's nickname is 'Fluff,' We closed with a 6-under 65 and Yours Truly won proximity on the rock outcropping hole!

Good day. Inspirational day!

Thank you to ALL our veterans! We salute you!



Good day. Inspirational day! Thank you Bob & Don for making it so special! Thank you to Doug Cartin & the CC of Gwinnett for hosting Ansy's Golf & Travel Diary!