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2015 Connecticut Section PGA Hall of Fame Inductee Profile: Tony Kelley

SOUTH GLASTONBURY, Conn. (November 24, 2015) - Russ Held, Connecticut Section PGA Publicist

Soft-spoken and humble, Tony Kelley has let his resume do the talking. And it just screams of the Hall of Fame.

The head golf professional at Wyckoff Country Club in Holyoke, Mass., has etched his place as one of the best golfers in the Connecticut Section PGA since its establishment in 1933. So it's no surprise that Kelley has found his way to the Section's Hall of Fame, joining two fellow club professionals as members of its Hall of Fame Class of 2015.

"It was a shock to me," Kelley said of the news. "I'm very humbled, it's quite an honor. I knew guys like Franny (Marrello) and others my age were in it. So maybe I thought I was somewhere (in consideration)."

The Section will induct its eighth class at its Hall of Fame Induction and Champions Tribute on Nov. 30 at Lake of Isles in North Stonington, Conn. "You look at the other Hall of Famers and they are the cream of crop," Kelley said. "Somebody must have thought I've done OK over the years."

Connecticut Section PGA Hall of Fame committee member Gary Reynolds said Kelley is a multi-dimensional golf professional. "Tony is such a dedicated and competitive golfer," Reynolds said. "He has an outstanding, consistent record over the decades. And at the same time, he has been a rock solid pro at his club. His service to the association and the way he plays the game . . . he's been outstanding."

The Hall of Fame night includes a program that also recognizes the 2015 PGA Member Championship winners, Player of the Year awards and the winner of the President's Award. "I'd just hope people think of me and say he's been a mix of having a good playing career and a good club pro," said Kelley, a Holyoke native. "My goal was always to be on the club pro side of it. And you sacrifice a lot trying to do your best."

Kelley is completing his 30th season as head pro at Wyckoff, a semiprivate, par 69 design of Donald Ross design known for its challenging greens. "I've loved it here," Kelley said. "I do teach a lot, I like running tournaments and the customer service part of it. It's still a lot of fun for me. The people are so good here. My wife (Tami) works here, her (Wojtowicz) family still owns the place.

"But I think some people think I play golf seven days a week."

While he doesn't, the West Springfield resident seems to play like he does. Kelley, 56, is one of the most decorated competitors in the Section. His resume starts with five Connecticut Section PGA Championship titles, victories ranging from 1988 to 2012.

"The Section Championship is always a big one in my mind," Kelley said. "I've been lucky enough to win it five times. The first one was special, but winning the last one 24 years later was really good. It's fun to compete for them."

The three-time Section Player of the Year has also won the Senior Player of the Year honor twice. Kelley has made a name for himself at the national level, qualifying for the 2000 PGA Championship and earning a spot eight times in the PGA Tour's Greater Hartford Open/Travelers Championship. "The PGA (Championship) was great, my father, my family, my brother, my wife, uncle . . . they were all there," Kelley said. "Besides the golf, the surroundings were fantastic. The locker room, you'd walk right by Tiger Woods. Even if he didn't really look at you. Eating lunch there . . . but once you got on the golf course, you were just playing golf. There were 40,000 people out there watching practice rounds."

Kelley punched that ticket to Valhalla GC by virtue of his top-25 finish that year at the Professional National Championship, the national stage for the country's top club pros. He has qualified for 16 Professional National Championships. "That's a great chance to go against all the top PGA pros, it's a national championship," Kelley said.

The GHO memories are plentiful, an opportunity to play a PGA Tour event in your backyard. "One year, I made a birdie at 16 and it was so hot. My hands were sweating so much, I hit a fluttery grounder off the 17th tee," Kelley said. "I took out an 8-iron so I could lay up and the whole wall of people out there sitting on the hill at 17 started booing me. So I grabbed a 2-iron, got it over the water and hit it pretty close. Then the whole wall of people started cheering like crazy.

"It's been a fun experience. You sign autographs for kids who don't know who you are. And I've come close to making the cut, came a couple shots away a couple of times."

The PGA Quarter Century Club member also ranks fourth all-time in the Section with nine individual professional championship titles. Kelley is also a member of the Western Mass. Golf Hall of Fame and was honored in 2004 as the guest of honor at the Western Mass. Tee Party. He has made four aces during his career, with three and his most recent coming at Wyckoff. "I was giving a playing lesson to a guy who was 90," Kelley said. "We had played six holes, and I was hitting a shot now and then. At the (par 3) seventh hole, he hits one, then another and ends up hitting three. So I put mine down, took a swing and knocked it in the hole. I turned to him and said, "Did you see that?" And he says, "Yeah, it went in the bunker.' "

Kelley roots in the game date back to days when his late father George brought him along to Orchards GC in South Hadley and to Wyckoff. "My father took up the game in his late 30s, but I started on the golf course when I was 6 or 7," Kelley said.

His first taste of the golf business came as a young adult when he caught wind of an opening in the pro shop of Harry Mattson at Springfield CC in West Springfield. "He was a mentor, I spent four years with him and I was ready (to be a head pro) by the time I left there. Harry let me do everything there," Kelley said.

Kelley landed an interview with Wyckoff owner Clarky Wojtowicz, a meeting that lasted "24 seconds." "I was ready and I felt comfortable taking on that role," Kelley said.

KELLEY NOTES: Among his most memorable stretches of golf came at a Section pro-am at Ellington Ridge CC in 2005. He birdied the first eight holes on the back nine, that after missing makeable opportunities at the eighth and ninth holes. "I still can't explain how that happened," he said. . . . Kelley's lowest competitive round has been a 63, shot at Fox Hopyard in East Haddam, Conn., and during a goodwill tournament in Bermuda. He has shot 64 from the blue tees at Wyckoff CC . . . Among his former and current assistant pros have been Bill Rosenblum, Mike Caporale, Francis Kringle, George Cefferatti and Rick Leal . . . One of five children of George and Connie Kelley, Kelley was educated at Holyoke High School, Holyoke Community College and the University of Massachusetts . . . Married wife Tami 18 years ago.

About the Connecticut Section PGA

The Connecticut Section, PGA of America is a not-for-profit organization chartered by The PGA of America in 1933 to promote golf and enhance the livelihood of its members. The Section is comprised of more than 350 men and women PGA Professionals who are employed at over 170 golf facilities throughout Connecticut and Western Massachusetts and who are committed to growing the game of golf. More information about The Connecticut Section is available on the organization's web site, located at www.ctpga.com.

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