

Brief History of the Great Lakes Senior Golf Association

On a cold, windy and snow blown night in February 1978, at the invitation of Bill Thiebout, thirty-seven men met at Lincoln Country Club to organize a senior golf association. Those in attendance greeted the idea with great enthusiasm. While the weather that night might have kept some from attending the meeting, and others were away in warmer climates for the winter, surely many more would want to join once play began. Everyone in attendance agreed to spread the word and tell other senior golfers about what had been organized.

Bill asked for volunteers to serve as a Board of Directors, to draw up by-laws and do any other thing necessary to get things started. The first Board included Bill Thiebout, Don DeVries, Chuck Miller, Bill Tilton, Al Krueger, Jerry Zee, Harold Fehrlen, Norm Elenbaas and Lloyd Ney. They met many times in the months ahead. Things to do included registering with the State of Michigan as a non-profit organization, writing the by-laws making sure they were legally worded and organizing the finances.

The first event was held at Fairway Estates in Grandville and over the years many different formats were tried including such things as picnics. Some things were learned the hard way using the old trial and error method. The awarding of gift certificates was superseded by our present system of awarding token cash prizes. Initially all entry fees were collected at the golf course, now we collect all of our fees in advance. At first, calculating handicaps was done manually and all records were maintained in written form. For a short period a USGA handicap provider was used for those services. In 1985 the Great Lakes Senior Golf Association purchased a computer system along with custom written database designed specifically for our organization by Fred VanOeveren. The database software has continually been updated adding new features. In 2000 Fred created our website (www.glsga.org) which continues to have new features added annually. In 2015 the website was updated with a new more modern look.

Starting in 1980 the bi-annual printing of a roster commenced. In 1986 the printing of the roster became an annual event. Due to cost, and other considerations, the annual roster is no longer printed. During the decade of the 1980s the organization grew rapidly. That growth forced adoption of a two-day tournament format allowing golfers to choose which day they preferred to play. By 1989 the waiting list for golfers requesting admission had grown so large that a second division was formed—the Reserve group. This group plays most of their tournaments on weeks alternating with the Regular group. In 2001 a season ending tournament open to members of both groups was initiated at Grand Haven Golf Club. In 2007, a season opening event at Pilgrim's Run was added. Initially this tournament was also open to both groups. Eventually Grand Haven and Pilgrim's Run were added to both divisions' annual schedules. In 2019, Pilgrim's Run and Grand Haven were replaced by The Mine and Gleneagle. In 2008 we added a tournament played at the Kent County owned golf course, L.E. Kaufman--one of the finest government owned golf courses in the state of Michigan. In 2011 a season ending tournament at Hastings Country Club was added our schedule and open to both divisions. In 2020 Hastings (renamed the Legacy at Hastings) was moved to fill the dates formerly used by the closed Deer Run GC.

In 2006, we added a two-day, 36-hole championship tournament. The Robert DeBok Memorial Championship was named in memory of our long time secretary-treasurer and determines both an actual score and net score champion.

By 2008 the Great Lakes Senior Golf Association had grown to over 500 members and conducted forty-five tournaments each year. In 2009 we added an additional 160 golfers, bringing our total to approximately 660, and expanded our schedule to include 60 tournaments. Our first female members were added in 2010. In 2012 the organization reached its membership limit of 720 golfers. We currently hold two organizational meetings each spring and host an annual fall banquet for our members. I think everyone will agree that we have come a long way from that initial meeting of thirty-seven men.

Originally compiled by Harold Fehrlen