

GOLF PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR

*This award bestows special recognition on a PGA member
whose total contributions to the game best exemplify the complete
and consummate PGA professional.*

ROBERT S. BALDASSARI, PGA - River Run Golf Club

Bob Baldassari has been the Head Golf Professional at River Run Golf Club in Berlin, MD since 1992, when he transferred from the New England PGA Section. From the day he arrived in the Middle Atlantic Section, he has worked diligently to promote the game of golf that he loves so dearly and the vital role that the PGA golf professional plays in it.

Bob has been immersed in the game of golf since birth. He attributes his love for the game and the success he has achieved in his career to his father's powerful influence and the strong foundation he provided; and to the inspiration he received from his mother to "*be the best in whatever field you pursue and live a life you can be proud of.*" His father, Robert H. Baldassari, is himself a PGA professional with a long history of success and dedication to the game of golf. Bob's mother, Claire, a former professional dancer and a tournament-tested golf competitor who knows first-hand the value of good practice, was a strong motivator for Bob. Claire was also Bob's "golfing partner" in his early years. Bob and his sisters, Lisa and Theresa, grew up with the game of golf playing a very important role in their family life, and they learned early the commitment that must be made to have a successful career as a PGA professional.

Bob's commitment to his profession and his leadership abilities were evident early in his career. He served as Secretary of the New England Assistants Association in 1990 and went on to serve as President of the New England Assistants Association in 1991 - 1992. He was elected to PGA membership in 1991, when he was also selected as the New England Section's Assistant of the Year. Bob continued to be active in section affairs and governance after moving to the Middle Atlantic Section. In 1995, he was elected Northern Chapter Secretary, then served as Northern Chapter Vice President, and this Fall, completes his term as Northern Chapter President. He has been a member of the MAPGA Section Board of Directors since 1995. In 1997, Bob received the section's Merchandiser of the Year (Resort Category) award. In 2000, he was the recipient of the section's Bill Strausbaugh/Club Relations Award. Under his guidance and supervision, five of Bob's First Assistant Professionals have been chosen for Head Golf Professional positions.

Bob also has a strong playing record which includes being selected for the New England Assistants' Wilson Squire Cup Team three consecutive years, 1989 - 1991, and being a member of the 1990 - 1991 Florida Winter Golf Tour. In 1993, he won the Middle Atlantic PGA Pro-Director; in 1994, he was winner of the Mid-Atlantic Pro-Superintendent; and in 1995, he won the Chesapeake Classic in Annapolis, Maryland. Recent shoulder problems, however, have limited his playing schedule.

In addition to his fine playing record and strong management and merchandising skills, Bob is well-known for the many hours he devotes to serving his community. He has served on the Maryland Governor's Economic Development Committee for Ocean City, Maryland since 1993. In 1999, Bob was appointed by the Governor to serve on the Maryland Water Advisory Committee, which was established as a result of the devastating effects of the previous year's drought conditions on the state's economy. Additionally, he has coordinated charity golf tournaments for the Gary Player Foundation. Since 1993, Bob has conducted an annual "Santa's Open" with the proceeds previously going to the Ocean City, Maryland JAYCEES Christmas Toy Program and more recently to the Big Brothers and Big Sisters organizations. In the nine years since its inception, this program has raised over \$250,000 in donations. In 1996, Bob was the lead instructor at a golf clinic for the Maryland Governor's Tourism Industry Conference. On the local level, Bob serves on the School Improvement Advisory Committee (SIAC) at his oldest daughter's school. The committee works with the school administration and the County Board of Education on facility upgrades as they pertain to the learning environment. Additionally, Bob serves as an "unofficial" assistant coach to the local high school's golf team. River Run GC is the team's home course, and Bob provides free lessons

and helps out with equipment for team members. Most recently, Bob has applied for a grant from The PGA to help fund a new junior golf program started this Fall called "Streets to Fairways." The program involves a three-tiered approach to get underprivileged kids involved in the game AND in the business of golf. Elementary grade kids get general "exposure" to the sport with educational materials, PGA instruction, and field trips to the golf course. Middle school kids, who are starting to make life decisions about which side of the tracks they are heading down, also get exposed to golf with instruction, but an emphasis will be placed on career opportunities available to them through the golf industry. High School students will have an opportunity to be involved in a "work-study" program with River Run GC and start to pursue one of the many career paths that golf has to offer.

As Chair of the section's Public Relations Committee, Bob has worked diligently to increase public awareness of the role of the PGA professional. He has developed many personal relationships with various media representatives as a result of his own involvement and service to his community. Bob is a regular contributor to the "Tee to Green" section of the *Maryland Times Press*, a Ganett Corporation newspaper that is distributed to thousands of readers throughout Maryland, Delaware and Virginia. In addition to writing articles, Bob is the official "golf source" for many of the Ocean City publications, radio and TV stations. Bob has been instrumental in the section's participation in Bobby Vermillion's *Golfing the Mid-Atlantic* (now renamed *Endless Golf*), which airs weekly on *Home Team Sports* and regularly features PGA professionals from the section. In the Spring of 2001, Bob started a weekly TV show called *The Delmarva Golf Show*, which he co-hosts with Jon Westman. They also have a monthly golf magazine, "*Delmarva Golf the Magazine*" and a website, "Delmarvagolf.com." The TV show is aired throughout the Delmarva Peninsula and the greater Baltimore cable system. The magazine is distributed to over 400 locations in five states. He also initiated a co-op arrangement with *Pros & Hackers* to produce an advertisement to be aired on *Sports Junkies Radio Show*. Bob has led the charge in encouraging members to use their PGA initials after their name on business cards, correspondence and voice mail. The section has made tremendous strides in the public relations arena, thanks in great part to Bob's tireless efforts. In 2000, Bob was appointed to the National PGA Public Relations Committee, and has brought many of the MAPGA's ideas and successes to the national level. He recently introduced a 14-point plan to the committee to improve public/community relations for The PGA and its member professionals.

Bob's professional objective is to be accomplished in all phases of the golf business and to exemplify the highest standard of professionalism. Bob himself summarizes it best in the following quote: *"I have known golf as long as I've known anything. Growing up in this game with your dad as a PGA professional offered me an intimate and unique view on golf, life, and the special people I have met and the friendships that have resulted. The joy of the game now is as strong as when I tagged along with my dad to the club each morning. The times and circumstances have changed, but I still have the desire to arrive at my club and be witness to generations, new and old, and their enjoyment of the game of golf."*

Bob is a devoted husband and father. He met his wife, Pam, when they were both attending Walsh College. Pam traveled with Bob to Florida all the winters that he worked as an Assistant and when he played the mini-tours. Bob calls them, *"the days when we didn't have much money in the bank, but they were 'rich' in memories because we relied on each other for inspiration and companionship. I always tell people that I've never given Pam a Honeymoon because I had to be at Indian Creek CC in Florida right after our wedding. I promised we would take one 'the next winter' . . . 13 winters later, she's still patiently waiting!"* Pam is involved in the day-to-day business of Bob's golf shop operation by helping with merchandising, staffing, special promotions, and the accounting aspect of the business. Bob and Pam have three children — Olivia, Victoria and Robert, Jr. With great pride, Bob expresses his love for the game and for his family, *"I hope my three kids really like the game of golf. I hope they enjoy all that it has to offer and they play it their whole lives. I've given them the same start I had, 'right from the crib,' and it is an amazing thrill to be on the golf course with Pam, Olivia, Victoria and Robert, walking down the fairway and seeing their smiles as they just play golf."*