

## **MERCHANDISERS OF THE YEAR**

This award is bestowed on those PGA Professionals who have demonstrated superior skills as merchandisers in the promotion of golf. This award recognizes excellence in golf shop operations in three categories: Private, Resort, and Public/Military/Semi-Private.

### **MERCHANDISER OF THE YEAR PUBLIC CATEGORY**

Aaron Palen, PGA  
Colonial Heritage Golf Club  
Williamsburg, Virginia

Aaron Palen has been selected as the recipient of the 2018 Public Merchandiser of the Year Award for his outstanding merchandise and professional golf shop management at the Colonial Heritage Golf Club.

Aaron was born on October 11, 1978 to Donna and John Palen Jr. Aaron's family also includes brothers John III and Stephen. He started playing golf when he was thirteen years old at the Concord Country Club in Concord, Mass. Aaron was working at the club in the bag room when he started taking lessons from Head Golf Professional Greg McFee. Aaron played golf for and graduated from North Carolina Wesleyan College with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration.

In September 2001, Aaron obtained his first golf professional job as the Assistant Golf Professional at the Benvenue Country Club in Rocky Mount, N.C. During his tenure at Benvenue, Aaron found his mentor in Head PGA Professional Rich Parker. He earned his PGA Membership in 2007 while working as an Assistant at International Country Club. In 2008, he accepted a new role as Head PGA Professional at The Golf Club at Lansdowne. After his time at Lansdowne, he held three more Head Professional or Director of Golf positions before landing at Colonial Heritage in 2015.

Since becoming the Head Golf Professional at the Colonial Heritage Golf Club in February 2015, Aaron has managed to switch the majority of all soft-good purchases from full wholesale or retail pricing to off-priced products. Through relationships with vendors, he has been able to solely purchase closeout products which allow the club to maintain high margins. Aaron also came in and added a personal touch to the merchandise display in the golf shop, changing the displays every few weeks giving the shop a fresh feel.

Aaron has implemented various promotional events over the year to drive business to his shop. Colonial Heritage ran two very successful hard good promotions in 2017, both being demo days. The first demo day was held in April and had five vendors that represented their 2017 equipment lines. The second demo day was an exclusive TaylorMade fitting day in September. The event lasted four hours and was marketed as a fitting day for the customers to experience a "tour level" fitting. Each fitting made a purchase with a 10% discount on all items purchased that day. Soft goods promotions include severely discounted items during the club's annual holiday party, as well as blowout sales before new merchandise hits the racks in the spring.

Aaron's merchandising philosophy is for every customer to leave as a friend. This is accomplished by himself and his team engaging with each customer and focusing on the attention to detail with each encounter. Taking the extra steps during each transaction, such as walking around the counter to hand the bag with a handshake, goes a long way. Following up with hand-written thank you notes, letting customers know their support of the shop means a lot; all helps in achieving that mission.

Aaron and his wife, Kristin Palen, have been married for thirteen years. The two have two children, Jayce who is six and the newest addition to the family, Kenzie.