

MERCHANDISER OF THE YEAR

These awards recognize those PGA Members who have demonstrated superior skills as merchandisers in the promotion of golf. The award is given for excellence in golf shop operations in three categories: Private, Resort, and Public/Municipal/Military/Semi-Private.

Private Category

ROBERT FIKAC, PGA - Lowes Island Club

Bob was born on September 11, 1963, in Alexandria, Virginia to Robert and June Fikac. He has one brother, James. Bob turned professional in 1985 and has been a member of The PGA since 1989. He got started in the golf industry by working on the superintendent's staff at Greendale Golf Course during high school. Bob was a fine player, winning the district championship as a high school sophomore. He then went on to Elon College in Elon, North Carolina where he lettered on the varsity golf team and graduated with a B.S. Degree in Marketing. After graduating in 1985, Bob went to work for PGA Professional Jim Folks at Bethesda Country Club as an assistant from 1985 to 1991. From there he went to work for Dennis Satyshur, the Head PGA Professional at Caves Valley Golf Club in 1991 and 1992. From November of 1992 to present, Bob has been the Head PGA Professional at Lowes Island Club.

According to Bob, merchandising is much more than the art of buying and selling. In fact, the most successful merchandisers are those who do not need to "sell" at all. Their patronage comes from knowing and caring about their customers on an intimate level and offering those customers outstanding service. By truly caring and being attentive, one can create the strongest bond possible between a merchant and a customer, that being a personal relationship. Bob believes that by building those relationships, one can earn the respect and comfort level that everyone desires when doing business. He further contends that any other merchandising ability or technique runs a distant second to making someone feel special. Bob feels that in today's market, in addition to being detail oriented, educated on your products, and taking pride in the appearance of your golf shop, we must be flexible and innovative.

As to how Bob got hooked on golf, he tells it best, "I was 13 and visiting my Great Grandmother (Lula McPhail) one summer and she took me out to her club to hit range balls. I fell in love with the game over the following year. I went to see her the following summer and we played in a '9-hole mixed twilight' together at her club and we won first place. An article was written in the "Mount Olive Tribune" about her and I winning and that she was my Great Grandmother. She was somewhat displeased that I told them she was my Great Grandmother and not just my Grandmother. I have loved golf ever since. My parents didn't play golf at the time, but they joined Woodlawn Country Club (now Mt. Vernon CC) so I could play and compete at every opportunity. I owe my career to my family."

Bob was named the MAPGA Assistant Professional of the Year in 1991. He served on the MAPGA Board of Directors as the A-8 Director in 1991-92, while also serving as the President of the MAPGA Assistants Association. He served the past two years as the Central Chapter's Director-at-Large and on the Section Sponsor Committee. Bob has been honored for his merchandising talents as a Titleist Top 100 Custom Club Fitter (1997) as well as twice making the *Golf Digest* Top 100 Golf Shops in America (1999, 2002).

Bob attributes his success to his two strong support groups, his family and staff, Head PGA Professional Andy Hersey, assistant professionals Sheldon Buytenhuys, Jeff Fulk, Brandon Lockhart, and Paul Hazelwood. He labels himself "extremely fortunate" to have the best of both. Bob especially thanks his Merchandise Manager, Debbie Phillip, for her dedication and expertise, which he feels helped him to earn the honor of receiving this award. He thanks his assistant professionals for being outstanding service-oriented individuals who have enabled the operation to be extremely successful.

In addition, Bob thanks his immediate family for allowing him the time at work to be successful. They have sacrificed a lot of time with him for his job. Bob and his wife, Fran, have been married for 17 years and have 2 children, Bobby (14) and Paige (9). Bob offers this sincere compliment for not only his wife but other PGA professionals' wives: "As any successful PGA professional will tell you, my wife has been my biggest support and the reason for my success."