

## **1997 TEACHER OF THE YEAR**

*This award bestows special recognition on a PGA Member who has performed outstanding service as a golf instructor along with overall distinguished performance as a golf professional.*

### **ROD THOMPSON - Kenwood Golf and Country Club**

For his dedication to teaching and his commitment to raising the level of enjoyment of the game of golf for all ages and experience levels, Rod Thompson is this year's Teacher of the Year. Born in Pontiac, Michigan in 1946, Rod's golf experience began at an early age. Rod's father introduced him to the game when he was just eight years old. The Thompson's lived across the street from a country club where young Rod spent his evenings watching the club's head professional practice, and afterward shagging balls for him. At 11 years old Rod got his first golf-related job as a caddie at Orchard Lake CC. When he wasn't working, Rod would play golf from dawn till dark. When he was 13 years old and working as a range attendant at Pine Lake CC, he had the opportunity to watch the head professional, Elmer Prieskorn, teach hundreds of lessons to LPGA Hall of Famers Sandra Post, Marilyn Smith and Sandra Palmer. Throughout his teen years and right up to the age of 18 when he turned professional, Rod learned many aspects of the golf business by working in such jobs as range attendant, bag boy, assistant to the caddie master and shop assistant. Rod was named Outstanding Junior and High School Player as an amateur. After declaring professional status in 1964, Rod worked full time at a small nine hole club and simultaneously earned his degree in Business Marketing from the University of Michigan and Eastern Michigan University.

Rod worked for eight years as the First Assistant at Pine Lake CC where he was very involved with teaching, earning his PGA membership in 1968. He further cultivated his teaching skills by spending two winters in Texas working with Henry Ransom, a former Ryder Cup team member. He attended numerous teaching seminars, including Kathy Whitworth's and Paul Runyon's, and gained immeasurable knowledge about teaching from Horton Smith, then Professional at Detroit Golf Club. Rod also credits Al Watrous, 30-year Professional at Oakland Hills; Walter Burkemo, PGA Champion; and Ted Kroll, U.S. Open Champion for their contributions to his professional development. At 28, Rod became the Head Professional at the prestigious Burning Tree Country Club and was distinguished as the youngest Head Professional in the Detroit Metropolitan Area. Rod founded the Michigan Section's Assistants Organization, served as its first President and was Chairman of Junior Golf, Education, and the Annual Magazine for the section. He also served on the committee for the first PGA National Junior

Championship. After two years at Burning Tree he was promoted to General Manager; he continued to serve as the Head Professional.

In 1978 Rod took a position as the Head Professional at Kenwood Golf and Country Club in Bethesda, MD. When he arrived at Kenwood there was no practice range, so Rod and his assistant dug trenches by hand to divert a stream and eventually created a practice range and teaching area. Over the past 20 years he has taught every club champion at his club, including men, women, seniors and juniors. Rod currently writes a monthly article entitled "Stroke Shavers" in his club's newsletter. He has attended at least 70 PGA teaching seminars, the PGA International Teaching and Coaching Summit four times, and has designed and built 12 training aids and visual aids for golf instruction. He has an exemplary record of service to the MAPGA including two-time MAPGA Golf Professional of the Year, President 1990 - 1991, two-time MAPGA Club Fitter of the Year, and two-time Titleist Top 100 Club Fitters in the United States.

Rod is the proud father of two children, Tricia Jane Thompson who is a 3rd year medical school student, and Samuel Scott Thompson who works for C & P Telephone following six years in the United States Marine Corps.

Rod attributes his success to a philosophy that includes "a never-ending search for knowledge, attention to detail, strong work ethic, awareness of how difficult the game can be and a willingness to help everyone." Rod admits that he derives as much enjoyment in helping a raw beginner get the ball up in the air as he does in getting the club champion to adjust his trajectory.

He takes great pride in working with generation after generation of his club's membership to make their golf game better and more enjoyable. To Rod, all of his students are champions.